



THE DOCTRINE OF MAHDISM

In the Ideological and Political Philosophy of
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi

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BACKGROUND

According to Shi'ite tradition, the Twelve Imams, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law Ali Ibn Abi Talib, were endowed with divine qualities that enabled them to lead the Shi'ite believers and to function as Allah's emissaries on earth. However, when the Twelfth Imam Muhammad Al-Mahdi¹ disappeared in 941 CE, his connection with the Shi'ite believers was severed, and since then, the Shi'ites are commanded to await his return at any time.

In the meantime, Shi'ite senior clerics are considered to be the representatives of the Imams, and thus have the authority to handle the affairs of the Shi'ite community, mainly in the religious and judicial spheres, until the Hidden Imam returns to lead the Shi'ite community and deliver it from its suffering.

According to Shi'ite belief, during the period of the Mahdi's absence (termed *ghaibat* or "occultation"), no one but God knows the hour of the Mahdi's return, and no man can presume to foresee when this hour will come. Upon the Mahdi's reappearance, all wrongs will be righted, divine justice will be instated, and the truth of Shi'ite Islam will be acknowledged by the entire world. (*Mahdism*)²

MAHDISM AND THE ISLAMIC REGIME IN IRAN

From the establishment of the Islamic Regime in 1979 to Ahmadinejad's rise to power in August 2005, *Mahdism* had been a religious doctrine and a tradition that had no political manifestation. The political system operated independently of this messianic belief and of the anticipation of the return of the Mahdi. It was only with Ahmadinejad's presidency that this religious doctrine has become a political philosophy and taken a central place in politics.

During the era of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of Iran's Islamic regime, *Mahdism* remained outside the political realm. However, Khomeini's era was nonetheless characterized by messianic fervor. The Iranians attributed messianic qualities to him, and conferred upon him the title of "Imam," which until then had been reserved for the Twelve Imams. In fact, Khomeini's rise to power was seen at the time as the realization of the prophecy regarding the Mahdi's return.

Khomeini's instatement of the Rule of the Jurisprudent (*velayat-e faqih*) in Iran prompted a transformation in Shi'ism, replacing its traditional passivity with a more active outlook. As part of this change, Khomeini stated that the Shi'ites

must not just passively await the return of the Mahdi, but must actively prepare the ground for his return and for the deliverance of the Shi'ite community. One component of this active approach was the taking of power by the clerics. However, Khomeini kept the doctrine of *Mahdism* at the periphery of the political sphere. He neither claimed to have a direct connection with God, nor presumed to foresee the hour of the Mahdi's return.

After Khomeini's death in 1989, *Mahdism* declined in Iran. The administrations of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) maintained strict separation between politics and *Mahdism* – a policy that would change with Ahmadinejad's presidency.³

This document reviews the politicization of *Mahdism* by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and by his spiritual mentor Ayatollah Taqi Mesbah-e Yazdi, and presents some of the reactions to it in Iran's political and intellectual circles.

AHMADINEJAD'S MESSIANIC POLICY – MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Immediately upon assuming the presidency, Ahmadinejad began to assert his belief in the imminent return of the Mahdi as the basis for his political activities. Despite the traditional belief that no one can foresee the hour of the Mahdi's return, Ahmadinejad frequently stated that his coming was nigh, and even gave a more specific prediction. During a meeting with the foreign minister of an Islamic country, he said that the crisis in Iran "presaged the coming of the Hidden Imam, who would appear within the next two years."⁴ In a December 2006 speech in Kermanshah, Ahmadinejad wished the Christians a merry Christmas and said: "I hereby announce that, with God's help, the day is not far off when Jesus will return at the side of the Hidden Imam."⁵

Not only has Ahmadinejad wished to proclaim the imminent coming of the Mahdi, and thereby to legitimize his policy and actions by associating them with Hidden Imam - but he has also presented himself as being directly connected to God. In a recent speech about Iran's nuclear program, he claimed to have "a connection with God," and exhorted the Iranians to be true believers so that God would support them in their just struggle for nuclear technology:

"Believe [me], legally speaking, and in the eyes of public opinion, we have absolutely succeeded. I say this out of knowledge. Someone asked me: 'So and so said that you have a connection.' I said: 'Yes, I have.' He asked me: 'Really, you have a connection? With whom?' I answered: 'I have a

connection with God,' since God said that the infidels will have no way to harm the believers. Well, [but] only if we are believers, because God said: You [will be] the victors. But the same friends say that Ahmadinejad says strange things. "If we are [really] believers, God will show us victory, and this miracle. Is it necessary today for a she-camel to emerge from the heart of the mountain⁶ so that my friends will accept the miracle? Wasn't the [Islamic] Revolution [enough of] a miracle? Wasn't the Imam [Ayatollah Khomeini] a miracle?... "⁷

Ahmadinejad has also presented himself as being privy to God's intentions and actions, as reflected in his statement that "God has appointed the Hidden Imam to be our supporter."⁸ His claim of having a direct relationship with God was also evident in the speech he made upon his return to Iran after addressing the U.N. General Assembly in 2005. Ahmadinejad claimed that, as he was delivering his U.N. address, he felt himself "surrounded by a halo of light" symbolizing the messianic nature of his message to the nations of the world.⁹

Ahmadinejad's speeches have been characterized by the use of messianic terms and by emphasis on the need to prepare the ground for the Mahdi's return.¹⁰ For example, in a May 2007 speech in Kerman province, he said: "We have a mission - to turn Iran into the country of the Hidden Imam."¹¹

As part of their commitment to these preparations, and at the suggestion of senior Ahmadinejad aide Parviz Daoudi, the Iranian ministers signed a pledge of allegiance to the Hidden Imam during the government's first session, along with the pledge of allegiance to Ahmadinejad.¹²

In accordance with his messianic policy, Ahmadinejad has also endorsed an Iranian-Shi'ite folk tradition which maintains that the Hidden Imam attaches special importance to the Jamkaran Mosque in Qom – a tradition that has not been supported by the conservative religious establishment.¹³ As part of this policy, Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Hossein Saffar Harandi was ordered to drop the ministers' pledge of allegiance into a well in the courtyard of the Jamkaran Mosque, where believers drop prayers and personal requests. Ahmadinejad has also allocated \$10 million for renovating the mosque and its surroundings in preparation for the return of the Mahdi, and in 2005, he spent some \$8 million on refreshments for pilgrims during the celebration of the Mahdi's birthday.¹⁴ The regime's encouragement of *Mahdism* is also evident in content on the website of Iran's government broadcasting service. For example, the site presents information on the Iranian TV series "The World Toward Illumination," which deals with the imminent arrival of the Mahdi.¹⁵

It should be noted that political manifestations of Ahmadinejad's messianic beliefs were evident even prior to his election to the presidency. According to reports, during

his term as mayor of Tehran (2003-2005), the municipality printed a city map which showed, among other things, the route that will be taken by the Mahdi upon his return.¹⁶

At the International Seminar on the Doctrine of *Mahdism*, held in Iran September 6-7, 2006 during the celebrations for the Mahdi's birthday, and attended by representatives of various countries, Ahmadinejad emphasized the universal and active nature of *Mahdism* and called on the West to accept it: "Today mankind is proceeding towards the truth. Today the happiness of mankind depends on proceeding towards the truth. Today we invite everyone to proceed towards the truth, since [the truth] is the only way... This celebration [of the Mahdi's birthday] is not only for Muslims but for the entire world. The Mahdi belongs to all of mankind..."

"The Hidden Imam has no tangible presence among us, but he is always [here], and we must prepare the ground for his speedy appearance... Some claim that during his occultation, his [nobility] is suspended, but that is not true... On the contrary, we must rush towards him and hasten to prepare the ground for his appearance. [He will not appear] if we sit idly. Mankind must hurry towards the Hidden Imam in order to reach him. A person who [actively hastens the coming of the Imam] is different from one who does not... Today, mankind is proceeding rapidly towards perfection, truth, justice, love, peace and compassion, and this is possible only under the rule of the perfect man [i.e. the Hidden Imam]..."¹⁷

MESSIANISM IN IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The messianic doctrine of *Mahdism* is also manifest in Iranian foreign policy, especially in its attitude towards the Western superpowers and towards the nuclear program. Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi, mentor to Ahmadinejad, expressed this approach in an October 11, 2006 speech: "The greatest obligation of those awaiting the appearance of the Mahdi is fighting heresy and global arrogance [i.e. the West, primarily the U.S.]."¹⁸

Ahmadinejad's speeches are characteristically derisive of the "forces of arrogance," i.e., the West, primarily the U.S., and threatening towards anyone who does not accept Shi'ite messianism as an alternative to the "perdition and destruction" awaiting them: "Those who do not respond to the call to proceed towards the truth – a good destiny does not await them. I heard that the president of one of those countries [i.e. U.S. President George Bush]... said that Iran's president was threatening him. I say to him: 'I am not the one threatening you. It is the entire world that threatens you, because the world in its entirety is steadfast against oppression and the oppressors. You [Western countries]

are nothing compared to the might of God. We invite you to [take] the righteous path, the path of the Prophets, of monotheism and justice. If you believe that you can sit in your glass palaces and determine the fate of the world, you are mistaken... Our call [to you] to take the direction of truth [stems] from pity. We do not want you to get into trouble, since you know that the outcome of oppression and injustice is perdition and destruction.”¹⁹

These characteristics are also evident in Ahmadinejad’s nuclear policy: In contrast to Khatami’s government, which endeavored to soften the position of the West on the nuclear issue via ongoing dialogue, Ahmadinejad and his close circle do not avoid confronting the West, since they consider this struggle to be one of the ways to prepare the ground for the return of the Mahdi.

According to the Internet daily *Rooz*, “Some of those close to Ahmadinejad, who frequently speak [of the need] to prepare the ground for the Mahdi’s return, explicitly link the [fate of] the Iranian nuclear dossier to this need... According to reliable information, they stressed, in various private meetings, that the [Iranian] opposition to global pressure [on the Iranian nuclear program] and its insistence on the right to utilize nuclear power are among the ways to prepare the ground for the return of the [Hidden] Imam.”²⁰

MAHDISM IN THE IDEOLOGY OF AYATOLLAH MOHAMMAD TAQI MESBAH-E YAZDI

The address given at this year’s International Seminar on the Doctrine of *Mahdism* by Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-e Yazdi shows that he too regards belief in the Mahdi as a concept that transcends the religious or theoretical realm. Ayatollah Yazdi gave this belief a tangible political-ideological dimension when he explained that the Mahdi’s return would lead to the establishment of a single rule over the entire world, and that the present battle against the infidels and against “the global arrogance” is preparing the ground for, and hastening, the coming of the Mahdi.²¹

“...Implementing the laws of Islam, establishing justice and fighting heresy and oppression are the most important duties for those who await [the return of] the Hidden Imam and prepare the ground for his coming... We must enhance religious faith and [the power] of religion in Iran and in the entire world... In order to hasten the coming of the Hidden Imam, we must disseminate justice and religious law, in order to increase the public’s awareness of them [throughout the world], so that the [Shi’ite] faith will be accepted by society [everywhere]...”

“One of the ideological aspects of the Mahdist doctrine is [its] universality, since the Mahdi comes to establish justice and righteousness in the entire world. Another aspect is the dissemination of justice and righteousness [under the rule of] a single man, a single center, and a single system. Since it is the Hidden Imam who is responsible for disseminating righteousness and justice, the world will need to have a single center and government... so that it will emerge from a state of [division] and establish a single [universal] rule headed by the [Hidden Imam], and every kind of oppression and exploitation will [then] vanish from the world...”

In a 2006 speech marking the Mahdi’s birthday, Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi emphasized the importance of fighting heresy, which, in his opinion, is delaying the coming of the Mahdi: “...Our noblest duty is to strive to reduce oppression, to be more [stringent] in our implementation of Islamic law... and to weaken the control of oppressive and tyrannical regimes over the oppressed. These [actions] can [hasten] the return of the Hidden Imam... If we wish to expedite the Mahdi’s coming, we must remove any obstacles [delaying his return]. What are the obstacles delaying the appearance of the Mahdi? [The are] the [heretical] denial of the blessing [conferred] on society by the presence of the Imam, [as well as] ingratitude, insubordination, and objections [to the doctrine of *Mahdism*]. If we want to hasten the coming of the Mahdi, we must eliminate these obstacles. We must strive to instate greater justice, ensure a [more stringent] implementation of Islamic law, [bring] the people to take greater interest in the faith and its directives, [establish] the religious laws as the dominant [values] of society, [ensure] that religious faith be taken as a consensus at conferences, and limit the [control of the oppressors, i.e. of the Western powers] over the oppressed throughout the world – both Muslim and non-Muslim. [This is what we must do] in order to prepare the ground for the Mahdi’s coming. Thus, the greatest obligation of those awaiting the appearance of the Mahdi is fighting heresy and global arrogance.”²²

SUPPORT FROM CONSERVATIVE-REVOLUTIONARY CIRCLES FOR THE POLITICIZATION OF THE MAHDIST DOCTRINE

The politicization of the doctrine of *Mahdism* has found support among conservative circles and certain sectors in the security forces that belong to the ideological camp of Ayatollah Taqi Mesbah-e Yazdi, which brought Ahmadinejad to power. The weekly *Parto-ye Sokhan*, for example, stated that “with the advent of the new government, and [due to] Ahmadinejad’s singular devotion to the Hidden Imam and his heir, the people of the West and [the Iranian] dissidents

fear a rise in *Mahdism* not only in Iran but throughout the world... [They fear this] because they see Ahmadinejad taking every opportunity and using every platform to spread this doctrine... so that the blessed name of the Mahdi is reaching the ears of all the people of the world, [even] from the world's most exalted political pulpit – the U.N. [Assembly Hall].”²³ *Parto-ye Sokhan* characterized Ahmadinejad's mention of the Mahdi in his U.N. speech as “one of [his] foreign policy successes.”²⁴

After Ahmadinejad's rise to power, Ayatollah Yazdi's pupil and spokesman Qassem Ravanbakhsh expressed his hope that “during Ahmadinejad's term in office, religious laws that were suspended and religious values that became weak [during the era of presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani]... will once again receive [due] attention in order to prepare the ground for the arrival of the Hidden Imam. Ravanbakhsh also rejected the claim that Ahmadinejad is not fit to be president because he is not a cleric, saying that being a cleric “is not a requirement for [serving the people].” To support this point, he stated that “in previous administrations – such as that of Khatami, who is a cleric – it was the presidency that dealt the worst blows to Islamic values.”²⁵

Support for Ahmadinejad's policy also came from the conservative group called Ansar-e Hizbullah. A spokesman, Ali Davani, said at one of the group's weekly meetings that Ahmadinejad's U.N. address in 2005 “was one of the signs [heralding the imminent] return of the Hidden Imam.”²⁶ Fatemeh Rajabi, who is affiliated with Ansar-e Hizbullah and who authored a book about Ahmadinejad titled *The Miracle of the Third Millennium*, said that the “Ahmadinejad government [was established to facilitate] the coming of the Hidden Imam.”

CLERICS CRITICIZE AHMADINEJAD'S MESSIANIC POLICIES

Ahmadinejad's messianic policies have drawn growing criticism from ayatollahs and senior religious figures in the religious seminaries in Qom who oppose the politicization of the messianic doctrine. Two articles published in the daily *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, the newspaper of the religious seminaries in Qom which represents the views of important Ayatollahs from the seminaries, emphasized the danger posed to the Shi'ite faith by the encouragement of messianic messages and by their propagation by Ahmadinejad, his supporters, and, by implication, Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi as well – a group they label “the spreaders of superstitions”:

1. *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*: Superficial Propaganda “Exposes Society to the Danger of Spiritual Weakness and [Leads to] Lack of Faith in the

Fundamentals of Religion”

In a September 13, 2006 editorial titled “The Danger of Superstitions: The Task of the Elected [Officials],” *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* expressed reservations about turning the Jamkaran Mosque into a holy site of the highest level of sanctity, and expressed doubt as to the validity of the traditions tying the mosque to the Hidden Imam. The article stated that clerics should fight the danger posed to Shi'ism and to Shi'ites by Ahmadinejad, his supporters, and his messianic policies. The article even derided Ahmadinejad for presuming to present himself as having contacts and meetings with the Mahdi, and accused him of destroying the faith:

“...Look at the ceremonies in the middle of the month of Sha'ban [celebrating the birth of the Mahdi]. The faith in the promised Mahdi, as expressed in Shi'ite culture and education, is the most advanced and most spiritual of religious beliefs. The Iranian people are arduously preparing themselves for this great day... But in essence, what is the benefit of all this preparation in terms of the people's spiritual growth and the advancement of their level of religious thought and culture? What pure religious knowledge fills the thirsty mouths of the public, which tenaciously turns [to the sources of Shi'ite jurisprudence] in order to quench its thirst?...

“Unfortunately, the true answer is that we are not just failing to quench the people's [thirst] with pure spirituality and pure religious knowledge, but, on the contrary, we are filling [their heads] with the greatest possible amount of idiotic beliefs, superficialities and falsities. Uneducated [people] have come to control the celebrations [of the Mahdi's birthday], and they are instilling the masses with a material [approach] that is unacceptable in both ideological and material terms. [These people rely] on the prestige of the religious leadership [an allusion to Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi], in opposition to the clear view of the Supreme Leader [Ali Khamenei] and of the senior clerics, who are the sources of religious authority in Shi'ism...

“This criticism... is a warning that comes to explain... that the propagation of a superficial view and of superstitions – especially in the field of religious knowledge – [exposes] society to the danger of spiritual weakness and [leads] to lack of faith in the fundamentals of religion...

“When we raise the sanctity of the Jamkaran Mosque to the point where it is presented as more important than mosques like the Holy Mosque [in Mecca], the Prophet's Mosque [in Medina]... the Al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem], the Kufa Mosque [in Iraq] and the Sahla Mosque [in Iraq]... and when it is announced that some three million pilgrims came to this mosque on the holiday of the Mahdi's birthday; when they drag the people, who are thirsting for spirituality, from every corner of the country to Jamkaran, using the unprecedented propaganda [employed by Ahmadinejad]...

and when speeches of praise and thanksgiving [are made] in which the people are promised that the Hidden Imam will make the pilgrimage to [the Jamkaran Mosque]... we know, of course, that there will be no pilgrimage or anything else. "How long will people continue to believe this propaganda before their faith is eventually shaken and emptied [of content]?... On what basis is [the Jamkaran Mosque] associated with all the propaganda, the miracles, and the [special] status [that is attributed to it], which are instilled among the people?"

"In order to realize the implications of these actions, look at the people who exploit the superstitions and present themselves as being in contact with the Mahdi, [the people who say] that they meet with him, or even that they are the Mahdi himself. [Then you will realize] what religious beliefs they have destroyed... how many harmful elements they have introduced into religion, and what danger lies in superstitions... The proponents of religion and senior religious thinkers and scholars must step into the ring and launch the difficult battle against the danger of superstitions. They must not rest until they arrive at a clear outcome."²⁷

2. Jomhuri-ye Eslami: "Myths Like 'The Halo of Light'... Make the Fight [Against False Beliefs] Even More Difficult"

Another *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* editorial, published October 11, 2006 under the title "Take this Warning Seriously," expressed strong reservations about Ahmadinejad's messianic pronouncements and the propagation of popular traditions tying the Jamkaran Mosque to the Hidden Imam:

"...[It is] saddening that false and idiotic beliefs have recently received reinforcement backed by force. Myths like 'the halo of light' [which Ahmadinejad felt surrounding him during his U.N. speech]²⁸ and claims of esoteric knowledge and clairvoyance – coming from people who are supposed, as one of their tasks, to fight these very things – are making the battle [against false beliefs] even more difficult..."²⁹

Senior ayatollahs also expressed reservations following the allocation of huge budgets for projects connected with the Jamkaran Mosque. *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* stated: "Most of the senior ayatollahs are not happy with the worsening [of the situation] regarding ossified and erroneous [beliefs] about the Jamkaran Mosque [i.e. the encouragement and propagation of popular messianic traditions regarding the Jamkaran Mosque]. Some time ago, one of the ayatollahs in Qom vigorously opposed the erroneous steps [being taken] in this mosque, like the [practice of] writing personal requests [to the Hidden Imam] and dropping them into the well near the mosque..." In addition, there were reports of the Qom seminaries' angry reactions to the fact that development funds allocated to the district were intended largely for developing the Jamkaran Mosque.³⁰

3. Ayatollah Montazeri: "The Fact That We Believe in [The Future Appearance of] the Hidden Imam Does Not Mean that Some [Government Officials] Should Exploit His Name for Politics"

In a January 31, 2006 interview, Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who is considered one of the most senior religious authorities in the Shi'ite world and in Iran, expressed his disgust at the political capital that Ahmadinejad is trying to derive from the name of the Mahdi.³¹ In the interview, Montazeri noted that "the fact that we believe in [the future appearance of] the Hidden Imam does not mean that some [government officials] should exploit his name for politics. I am opposed to this kind of exploitation. The exploitation of the holy names causes the people and the younger generation to be disgusted with religion, since there is no flaw in the essence of Islam, and every flaw that exists [due to exploitation of religion] will hurt our Islam... In the early days of the Islamic Revolution, the people shouted slogans like: 'Independence, freedom and Islamic Republic'... [The term] Islamic [means] based on the fundamentals of Islam —Islam in which the qualified [authorities] are religious authorities, great and wise people, and not [Islam] in which anybody who has a little learning [immediately] wishes to express an opinion on Islamic issues..."³²

REFORMIST INTELLECTUALS CRITICIZE THE POLITICIZATION OF MAHDISM

Intellectual Mohsen Kadivar: "Hasn't the Time Come for [the Ayatollahs] and the Clerics to Clarify Their Position on These Claims?"

The intellectual and cleric Mohsen Kadivar pointed to the danger posed to Islam by Ahmadinejad's messianic leanings. In a speech on the occasion of *Eid Al-Fitr*, Kadivar criticized the incorporation of the Mahdist doctrine in Ahmadinejad's political platform. The report was originally published by the ILNA news agency, and is cited on Kadivar's website:

"[Kadivar said:] 'We can point to the past year as the heyday of religious nonsense.' [He] sharply criticized the proud declarations by [government officials] that 'the number of visitors to the fictitious place (i.e. the well at Jamkaran Mosque) is several times larger than the number of pilgrims [visiting] the grave of the eighth Imam [Reza, in the city of Mashhad].' [Kadivar] described this calamity as 'the result of propaganda for false beliefs,' saying that 'as long as the regime propagates false beliefs, we should naturally expect [these beliefs] to become more and more prevalent in the country.' Kadivar declared that '[claims that the Hidden Imam] gives special attention to the Ahmadinejad government are a sign of the propagation of false beliefs... Hasn't the time come

for [the ayatollahs] and the clerics to clarify their position on these claims?"³³

Intellectual Hashem Aghajari: "In the Era of the Mahdi's Occultation, No One Can Claim to Have Prophetic Mission or to Represent Him"

Hashem Aghajari, the academic who has twice received a death sentence for challenging the religious establishment in Iran and calling for religious reform, criticized Ahmadinejad for his professed connection with the Hidden Imam. In a speech to students at Amir Kabir University in Tehran on marking Laylat Al-Qadr,³⁴ Aghajari said: "... We are today in the era of [the Hidden Imam's] occultation, and since the Prophet [Muhammad] was the Seal of the Prophets, and the Mahdi is the last of the Imams – and he is in occultation – no one else can claim [to have] a prophetic mission or to represent [the Hidden Imam], nor can they base themselves on such a prophetic mission... in order to rule over the people..."³⁵

Spokesman for the Reformist Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami Party: "When Some in the Government... Say That the Hidden Imam Will Be Revealed in the Coming Two Years, This Has No Result Other Than to Weaken the Faith of the Masses"

Mohsen Armin, former member of the Sixth Majlis and speaker for the reformist Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami Party, came out strongly against statements attributed to Ahmadinejad that the Hidden Imam will be revealed in the next two years: "When some in the government are planning to prepare the ground [for the Mahdi's coming] and say that the Hidden Imam will be revealed in the coming two years, this has no result other than to weaken the faith of the masses. The propagation of such statements by private parties endangers our future..."³⁶

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NOTES

¹ The Twelfth Imam, the Shi'ite messiah, is also called Muhammad Al-Muntazar ("the expected"), Imam Al-Zaman ("The Imam of the Age") and "the Hidden Imam."

² *Sobh-e Sadeq* (Iran), April 30, 2007.

³ For details about Ahmadinejad's rise to power and about the "Second Islamic Revolution," see MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis No. 253, "The 'Second Islamic Revolution' in Iran: Power Struggle at the Top," November 17, 2005, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA25305>

⁴ *Aftab* (Iran), November 16, 2005, quoted in *Rooz* (Iran), December 12, 2005.

⁵ *Emrooz* (Iran), December 20, 2006.

⁶ This refers to a Koranic verse (7:73).

⁷ *Iran News* (Iran), October 15, 2006. For more information on Ahmadinejad's claims regarding his connection with God, see MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 1328, "Iran President Ahmadinejad: 'I Have a Connection With God, Since God Said That the Infidels Will Have No Way to Harm the Believers'; 'We Have [Only] One Step Remaining Before We Attain the Summit of Nuclear Technology'; The West 'Will Not Dare To Attack Us,'" October 19, 2006, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP132806>.

⁸ *Fars* (Iran), April 1, 2007.

⁹ *Rooz* (Iran), October 1, 2006.

¹⁰ *Aftab*, (Iran), May 10, 2007

¹¹ For examples, see *Kayhan*, September 29, 2005; Fars news agency, October 11, 2005; *Sharq*, November 12, 2005; ISNA news agency, November 16, 2005; IRNA news agency, April 16, 2006; *Kayhan*, November 23, 2006; *Emrooz*, December 20, 2006; *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, December 24, 2006.

¹² ILNA (Iran), October 17, 2005.

¹³ Shi'ite scholars are divided regarding the status of this mosque. The daily *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, which is affiliated with the religious seminaries in Qom and which represents the views of important Ayatollahs from the seminaries, stated that the mosque is no different than any other (September 13, 2006), while the weekly *Parto-ye Sokhan*, affiliated with Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-e Yazdi, cited the traditional belief that the mosque had been built at the order of the Hidden Imam and that it holds special importance for him (September 20, 2006).

¹⁴ The Shi'ites celebrate the birthday of the Hidden Imam on the 15th day of the Muslim month of Sha'ban, which, in 2006, coincided with September.

¹⁵ See MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 1436, "Waiting for the Mahdi: Official Iranian Eschatology Outlined in Public Broadcasting Program in Iran," January 25, 2007, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP143607>.

¹⁶ The reports stated that "the distribution of a distorted map... showing the route [that will be taken] by the Mahdi [upon his return] has been stopped [following critical] reactions from political and religious circles. The map was distributed by Tehran municipality... but the copies were soon recalled following [criticism] by senior officials in the regime." (Hatef website – apparently the website Hatef News, associated with supporters of Rafsanjani – December 5, 2005, quoted in *Rooz*, December 5, 2005).

¹⁷ ISNA (Iran), September 6, 2006.

¹⁸ *Parto-ye Sokhan* (Iran), October 11, 2006.

¹⁹ ISNA (Iran), September 6, 2006, <http://www.isna.ir/Main/News-View.aspx?ID=News-784304&Lang=P>.

²⁰*Rooz*, October 16, 2006, as cited by the Entekhab website on October 16, 2006, <http://www.entekhab.ir/display/?ID=6760&page=1>.

²¹*Kayhan* (Iran), September 10, 2006.

²²*Parto-ye Sokhan* (Iran), October 11, 2006.

²³*Parto-ye Sokhan* (Iran), March 1, 2006.

²⁴*Parto-ye Sokhan* (Iran), October 9, 2005.

²⁵ILNA (Iran), August 9, 2005.

²⁶Ruidad, September 25, 2005, as quoted in *Rooz*, December 5, 2005.

²⁷*Jomhuri-ye Eslami* (Iran), September 13, 2006; On September 20, 2006, Qassem Ravanbakhsh published an article in *Parto-ye Sokhan* in which he denied *Jomhuri-ye Eslami's* accusations.

²⁸The reference is to Ahmadinejad's claim that he felt that he was surrounded by a halo of light when he spoke at the U.N. General Assembly in September, 2005.

²⁹*Jomhuri-ye Eslami* (Iran), October 11, 2006.

³⁰Ruidad, August 13, 2005, as reported in *Rooz*, December 5, 2005.

³¹Ayatollah Montazeri was removed from the line of succession by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, following his expression of criticism of the regime's violations of human rights.

³²From Montazeri's website: <http://www.amontazeri.com/Farsi/Payamha/90.htm>.

³³From Kadivar's website, <http://www.kadivar.com/Index.asp?DocId=1571&AC=1&AF=1&ASB=1&AGM=1&AL=1&DT=dtv>.

³⁴According to Muslim tradition, *Laylat Al-Qadr* marks the beginning of Muhammad's prophetic revelation.

³⁵ISNA, October 23, 2005.

³⁶*Rooz*, October 18, 2005. In addition, in a *Rooz* article from January 30, 2006, the intellectual 'Abd Al-Karim Soroush accused Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi of "educating [people] to an extremist and incorrect use of [the name of] the Hidden Imam, and in general of using religion as an instrument."

