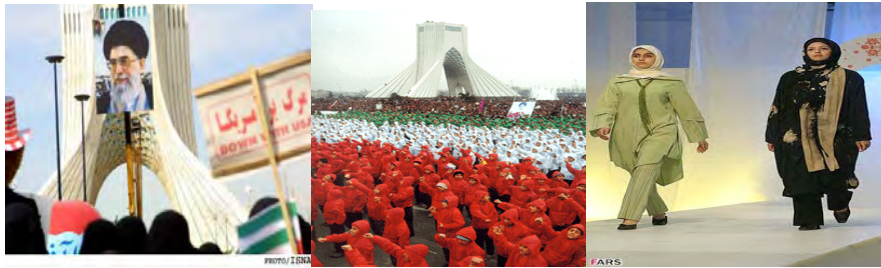




The Meir Amit Intelligence  
and Terrorism Information Center

## Spotlight on Iran

November 2011—Aban 1390  
Week of November 23-30,  
2011  
Editor: Raz Zimmt



### Highlights of the week:

- ✓ Tehran dismisses Western threats to impose sanctions on import of oil from Iran
- ✓ Escalation in Iran-Britain relations: Iran decides to downgrade diplomatic relations; students break into British embassy
- ✓ Authorities once again impose limitations on Shi'ite mourning ceremonies ahead of Ashura Day
- ✓ "Book of the Year" at 13th book fair in Khorasan Province: *How to Eliminate Israel*

### Highlights of the week:

#### Tehran dismisses Western threats to impose sanctions on import of oil from Iran

This week Iran dismissed the threats increasingly made by European countries to impose new sanctions on its petroleum industry and cease importing Iranian oil. In

response to a statement made by the French Foreign Ministry, according to which France called on its European partners to stop importing oil from Iran, Deputy Petroleum Minister Ahmad Qalebani said that any sanctions by France on the import of Iranian oil would be meaningless. Petroleum Minister Rostam Qasemi said that Western countries cannot ignore Iran's position on the global oil market and the quality of its oil exports, and that, in any case, most of the Iranian oil is exported to East Asian countries.

Deputy Economy Minister Behrouz Alishiri also commented on the threats made by the West to impose sanctions on Iran's oil sector, saying that Iran has no problem attracting foreign investments into its oil industry. He noted that 60 percent of the investors who took part in an international investment conference held in Tehran last week said they were willing to cooperate with directors of Iranian petroleum companies in oil, gas, and petrochemistry projects.

Seyyed Emad Hosseini, a spokesman for the Majles Energy Committee, also dismissed the possible effect of sanctions imposed by European countries on Iran's oil sector. In an interview given to the Fararu website, Hosseini said that any European sanctions imposed on the oil market would have no real effect since most of Iran's exports go to Asian countries, with European countries responsible for importing as little as 18 percent of all Iranian oil in the first six months of 2011.

A commentary article published by the daily Tehran Emrouz said that the economic crisis currently gripping Europe, the concerns of European leaders over the increase of oil prices, and the understanding that there is no substitute for the oil produced by Iran, will prevent the European authorities from imposing sanctions on the Iranian oil industry. The reformist daily Mardom Salari also argued that it is impractical to impose oil sanctions against Iran, and that, at any rate, Europe stands to lose the most from such sanctions.

### **Escalation in Iran-Britain relations: Iran decides to downgrade diplomatic relations; students break into British embassy**

Earlier this week the Majles passed a bill requiring the government to downgrade Iran's diplomatic relations with Britain from ambassador to chargé d'affaires, and to reduce to a minimum Iran's economic and commercial relations with that country.

Under the bill, the Foreign Ministry has two weeks to take the necessary measures to downgrade the relations, which include expelling the British ambassador from Tehran.

After the Majles vote, Majles Speaker Ali Larijani said that the British government should know that the recent resolution is only the beginning, and that the government will continue closely watching Britain's policy towards Iran. Foreign Minister Ali-Akbar Salehi announced that the resolution adopted by the Majles serves as an important lesson for the government of Britain, which believes it's within its rights to take any action against another country without expecting an appropriate response. He added that Iran will be willing to normalize its relations with Britain if the latter changes its conduct towards Iran.

On Tuesday Iranian students held a protest rally in front of the British embassy in Tehran, shouting slogans against Britain and its policy towards Iran and demanding to close down the British embassy and downgrade the relations with Britain. A group of students broke into the embassy building, looted offices, set documents on fire, and burned the flag of Britain.

Iran's conservative media also expressed its support for downgrading the relations with Britain. The Tabnak website argued that the resolution adopted by the Majles is not enough, and that the government is now required to implement the decision as soon as possible. The website stressed that the political disagreements between the Majles and the government must not be allowed to delay the implementation of the resolution, and that the government has to demonstrate resolve in its execution.

The daily Siyasat-e Rooz said that the resolution is expected to have a negative impact on Britain's international status, particularly when it comes to developments in the Middle East. A commentary article published by the daily said that downgrading the relations is an expression of Iran's political power on the international scene and proof that Western claims on its international isolation are groundless. By deciding to downgrade its relations with Britain, Iran has proven that it follows an independent foreign policy and is not concerned over the possible tightening of sanctions against it. Iran wishes to maintain good relations with all the countries in the world, with the exception of Israel, provided these countries take a fair stance towards and show respect for Iran.

## **Authorities once again impose limitations on Shi'ite mourning ceremonies ahead of Ashura Day**

As in previous years, Iranian authorities imposed limitations on Ashura Day events, which include mourning and lamentation ceremonies marked by Shi'ite Muslims on the tenth day of the month of Muharram in remembrance of Husayn bin Ali, the third imam, who died in the massacre of Karbala in 680 CE. Ahmad Reza-Radan, acting chief of the internal security forces, warned that the police will take strong action to combat self-flagellation and all forms of "superstition" during the mourning processions.

At the same time, top cleric Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi ruled that self-flagellation and the use of musical instruments during the mourning processions are forbidden in Islamic religious law. He also warned about the use of the Ashura ceremonies for political ends, particularly with the Majles elections coming soon.

In recent years the authorities have imposed severe restrictions on the observation of the traditional Shi'ite mourning ceremonies. The restrictions are part of a larger campaign to allow the country's ruling clerics to retain exclusive control of Iranian religious life and keep a closer watch on religious expressions that could challenge the "official" interpretation deemed acceptable by the religious leadership. The restrictions are also aimed to prevent the exploitation of the ceremonies by regime opponents to violate public order.

Meanwhile, a senior official in the Islamic Publicity Organization suggested banning TV broadcasts during the two Shi'ite mourning days, arguing that television encourages people to stay home instead of going to mosques and mourning processions, leaving the mosques and the streets empty of believers.

## **"Book of the Year" at 13th book fair in Khorasan Province: How to Eliminate Israel**

How to Eliminate Israel, a book written by a group of religion students from the religious seminary in the city of Qom, was displayed last week at the 13th book fair in

Khorasan Province and even awarded "Book of the Year" in the category of books dealing with the "soft war".

The book is divided into seven chapters which discuss the "characteristics of Israeli thought", the crimes of the Israeli people, warnings given by Quran to Muslims regarding the Jews, their weak points, and ways of dealing with them.

The head of the author team said that the book is based on a ruling by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, according to which the elimination of the State of Israel is a duty under Islamic religious law. He took issue with the fact that Iranian institutions in general and religious seminaries in particular do not invest enough efforts in dealing with Israel, and ignore the role of Zionism as the root of all social, cultural, and political problems faced by Muslims. He argued that, if this issue is given more weight, Israel will understand that the Muslim nation is committed to implementing the Supreme Leader's instructions, and even be prevented from threatening a military attack on Iran.

### **Tehran dismisses Western threats to impose sanctions on import of oil from Iran**

This week Iran dismissed the threats increasingly made by European countries to impose new sanctions on its petroleum industry and cease importing Iranian oil. Last weekend the French Foreign Ministry announced that France called on its European partners to stop importing oil from Iran. A spokesman for the Italian Foreign Ministry also reported that Italy intends to stop importing crude oil from Iran.

In response to the statements, Deputy Petroleum Minister Ahmad Qalebani said in an interview given to Mehr News Agency that Iran's national petroleum company does not export any crude oil to France, making France's sanctions on the import of Iranian oil meaningless. He noted that, thanks to its oil and natural gas reserves, Iran enjoys an important position in the world energy market, and therefore cannot be ignored (Mehr, November 25). According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), France imports approx. 49,000 barrels of Iranian oil per day, while Iran exports anywhere between 2 and 2.5 million barrels daily.

Deputy Economy Minister Behrouz Alishiri also commented on the threats made by the West to impose sanctions on the oil sector, saying that Iran has no problem attracting foreign investments into its oil industry. Speaking about an international investment conference held in

Tehran last week, he noted that 60 percent of the investors who took part in the conference said they were willing to cooperate with directors of Iranian petroleum companies in oil, gas, and petrochemistry projects. In an interview given to ISNA News Agency, the deputy minister said that, during the conference, 10 foreign companies held talks with the directors of Iranian oil companies, and that before the conference Iran had already signed 3.4 billion dollars' worth of contracts in two oil and petrochemistry projects (ISNA, November 26).

Seyyed Emad Hosseini, a spokesman for the Majles Energy Committee, also dismissed the possible effect of sanctions imposed by European countries on the Iranian oil sector. In an interview given to the Fararu website, Hosseini said that the Western threats to impose sanctions on the Iranian oil industry are nothing new, and that restrictions on foreign investments into the industry had already been imposed by the United States and Europe without causing any particular problems for Iran. He noted that any sanctions imposed by Europe on the oil market would have no real effect since most of Iran's exports go to Asian countries, with European countries responsible for importing as little as 18 percent of all Iranian oil in the first six months of 2011. He went on to say that the world cannot ignore Iran's major role in the production of oil and natural gas and the possible negative impact of sanctions against Iran on the global economy. According to Hosseini, Iran has proven itself unconcerned with sanctions and able to turn threats into opportunities (Fararu, November 26).



**"New sanctions" (Roouz Online, November 22)**

A commentary article published by the daily Tehran Emrouz said that the economic crisis currently gripping Europe has the continent's leaders seriously concerned about a possible increase in energy prices in case sanctions are imposed on the Iranian oil sector. France, Britain, and Canada are the only countries that currently support such sanctions. The daily cited international media reports estimating that sanctions against Iran's oil industry will exacerbate the economic crisis in the West. Also according to the daily, the World Bank warned about the

consequences of imposing such sanctions for oil prices worldwide and the global economy. What is more, there is an agreement among the oil producing countries that they are unable to compensate for Iran's oil production due to the large quantity the country exports daily. Such estimates are enough to keep the European authorities from imposing sanctions on the Iranian oil industry, Tehran Emrouz said (Tehran Emrouz, November 27).

The reformist daily Mardom Salari also argued that imposing sanctions on the import of oil from Iran is something that cannot be easily accomplished. An editorial published by the daily said that the European countries that support the sanctions are those that do not import oil from Iran, such as Germany and France, while those that do and are currently experiencing a severe economic crisis, including Italy, Spain, and Greece, have reservations about such measures.

The daily argued that, in the short term, no substitutes can be found for the oil produced by Iran, and that, at any rate, sanctions on the import of Iranian oil will not deal a blow to Iran's oil revenues. Even if the quantity of oil that Iran can export is reduced, sanctions on the import of its oil will trigger a significant increase in oil prices, compensating the country for the drop in oil sales. Saying that Europe stands to lose the most from sanctions against the Iranian oil industry is not just a political slogan, Mardom Salari concluded (Mardom Salari, November 28).

Petroleum Minister Rostam Qasemi and Economy Minister Mehdi Ghazanfari said recently that if the West imposes sanctions on the import of oil from Iran, it is the world markets that will face the greatest threat. This week Qasemi stated once again that Western countries cannot ignore Iran's status in the international oil market and the quality of the oil it produces, and that, at any rate, most of the Iranian oil is exported to East Asian countries (ISNA, November 27).

### **Escalation in Iran-Britain relations: Iran decides to downgrade diplomatic relations; students break into British embassy**

Earlier this week the Majles passed a bill requiring the government to downgrade Iran's diplomatic relations with Britain from ambassador to chargé d'affaires, and to reduce to a minimum Iran's economic and commercial relations with that country. The bill was passed following Britain's support for additional sanctions against Iran, and its decision last week to impose sanctions on Iran's Central Bank for the country's refusal to suspend its nuclear program. 179 Majles members voted in favor of the bill, four voted against, and eleven abstained. The four who voted against demanded a complete halt of relations between the two countries. During the discussion, a number of Majles members shouted "death to Britain". The bill was also approved

by the Guardian Council this week. Under the bill, the Foreign Ministry has two weeks to take the necessary measures to downgrade the relations, which include expelling the British ambassador from Tehran.

After the Majles vote, Majles Speaker Ali Larijani said that the British government should know that the recent resolution is only the beginning, and that the Majles will continue closely watching Britain's policy towards Iran (Fars, November 27). Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said during the discussion that, for many years before the Islamic revolution, Britain's policy towards Iran was based on treachery and crimes against the Iranian people. He called on Foreign Minister Ali-Akbar Salehi to expel the British ambassador from Tehran, because normal relations between the two countries should not be allowed under current conditions (Farda News, November 27).

Foreign Minister Ali-Akbar Salehi announced that the resolution adopted by the Majles serves as an important lesson for the government of Britain, which conducts itself unreasonably and irrationally and believes it's within its rights to take any action against another country without expecting an appropriate response. He noted that if Britain changes its conduct towards Iran, the latter will also change its stance on Britain and be willing to consider normalizing relations between the two countries (IRNA, November 28).

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said this week that Britain has a long history of humiliating nations, destroying cultural heritage, and appropriating resources. In a speech given on Navy Day, marked Monday, November 28, Khamenei said that since the Islamic revolution Britain can no longer humiliate Iran as it used to (ISNA, November 29).

Full diplomatic relations between Britain and Iran were reinstated in 1988, only to be severed a year later over Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*. The relations were reinstated for the second time in 1990 and upgraded to ambassadorial level in 1999. On several occasions in the past several years, Iran once again accused Britain of working to topple the regime, providing assistance to opposition organizations, and being involved in the riots that broke out after the presidential elections in the summer of 2009.

On Tuesday Iranian students held a protest in front of the British embassy in Tehran, shouting slogans against Britain and its policy towards Iran. They demanded that the British embassy be closed down and that relations with Britain be downgraded. A group of students broke into the embassy building, set documents on fire, and burned the British flag.





Iran's conservative media also expressed its support for downgrading the relations with Britain. The Tabnak website argued that the resolution adopted by the Majles is not enough, and that the government is now required to implement the decision as soon as possible and downgrade the relations between the two countries. The website warned that failure or delay in the implementation of the resolution may compromise Iran's national interests. Tabnak stressed that the political disagreements between the Majles and the government must not be allowed to delay the implementation of the resolution, and that the government has to demonstrate resolve in its execution (Tabnak, November 29).

The daily Siyasat-e Rooz said that the resolution is expected to have a negative impact on Britain's international status, particularly when it comes to developments in the Middle East. A commentary article published by the daily said that downgrading the relations is an expression of Iran's political power on the international scene and proof that Western claims on its international isolation are groundless. The daily cited Iranian commentators saying that Britain will have a difficult time maintaining its status in the Muslim world and the Middle East now that its relations with Tehran have been downgraded. Given Iran's major role in the region, having ties with it is the key to Western involvement in the Middle East and Western Asia. The commentators also argued that Western countries are concerned over the possibility of Russia and China exploiting the downgrade to improve their relations with Tehran and strengthen their position in the Middle East.

By unilaterally deciding to downgrade its relations with Britain, Iran has proven that it follows an independent foreign policy, and that its leaders will let no country meddle in its affairs and are not concerned over a possible tightening of sanctions against it. Iran wishes to maintain good relations with all the countries in the world, with the exception of Israel, provided these countries take a fair stance and show respect for it. Iran continues its resolute, independent foreign policy,

in accordance with the principles laid out by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, and refuses to stray from its path despite the pressure, sanctions, plots, and military threats that it is facing (Siyasat-e Rooz, November 28).

### **Authorities once again impose limitations on Shi'ite mourning ceremonies ahead of Ashura Day**

As in previous years, Iranian authorities imposed limitations on Ashura Day events, scheduled for next week, which include mourning and lamentation ceremonies marked by Shi'ite Muslims on the tenth day of the month of Muharram in remembrance of Husayn bin Ali, the third imam, who died in the massacre of Karbala in 680 CE.

Ahmed Reza-Radan, acting chief of the internal security forces, warned this week that the police will take strong action to combat self-flagellation and all forms of "superstition" during the mourning processions (ISNA, November 28). At the same time, senior cleric Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi ruled that self-flagellation and the use of musical instruments during the mourning processions are forbidden by Islamic religious law. He also warned about the use of the Ashura ceremonies for political ends, particularly with the Majles elections coming soon (ISNA, November 26).



Photo :Hamed Malekpour

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In recent years Iranian authorities have imposed severe restrictions on the observation of the traditional Shi'ite mourning ceremonies. Among other things, the authorities have prohibited self-flagellation during the ceremonies, conducting the ceremonies after midnight, displaying images of the Shi'ite imams, and using musical instruments. In addition, during the Ashura measures have been taken to stop the distribution of religion-themed CDs that don't have the authorities' approval.

The restrictions on the Ashura ceremonies can be seen as part of a larger campaign led by the regime to allow the country's ruling clerics to retain exclusive control of Iranian religious life and keep a closer watch on religious expressions that could challenge both the "official" interpretation deemed acceptable by the religious leadership and the concept of "rule of the religious jurispudent" (*velayat-e faqih*). The restrictions are also aimed to keep the ceremonies from being used by regime opponents to violate public order.

Meanwhile, Seyyed Mohammad Sadat Mansouri, a senior official in the Islamic Publicity Organization and head of the Center for Answering Religious Questions, suggested banning TV broadcasts during the two Shi'ite mourning days to encourage people to go out to mosques and mourning processions. Mansouri argued that even televised sermons and religion programs cause people to prefer to stay home and watch TV instead of joining mourning processions and going to mosques. As a result, there are no believers to be seen in mosques or on the streets, which spoils the spirit of the Ashura (Aftab, November 27).

### **"Book of the Year" at 13th book fair in Khorasan Province: How to Eliminate Israel**

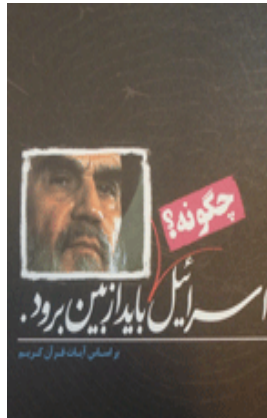
*How to Eliminate Israel*, a book written by a group of religion students from the religious seminary in the city of Qom, was displayed last week at the 13th book fair in Khorasan Province

Hojjat-ol-Eslam Mohammad Ebrahim-Nia, head of the author team, said in an interview given to RASA News Agency that *How to Eliminate Israel* was awarded "Book of the Year" in the category of books dealing with the "soft war" at the fair where it was displayed. The 180-page book was published in 3000 copies on behalf of the General Department of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Khorasan Razavi Province.

The book is divided into seven chapters which discuss the "characteristics of Israeli thought", the crimes of the Israeli people, warnings given by the Quran to Muslims regarding the Jews, their weak points, and ways of dealing with them. In addition to up-to-date translations of relevant verses from the Quran, the book includes pictures of Zionists associated with the themes of the cited verses and relevant statements made by Jewish thinkers, Ebrahim-Nia said.

He noted that the content and title of the book are based on religious rulings issued by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, who ruled that the elimination of the State of Israel is a religious duty similar to other duties imposed on Muslims. The verses of the Quran

which discuss the Jews are always applicable, he said, and there is no other people about which the Quran warns the Muslims as much as the Jews, who even now continue their crimes against the Muslim nation.



**The cover of How to Eliminate Israel**

Ebrahim-Nia criticized the insufficient attention accorded by the institutions of the Islamic republic to the necessary struggle against Israel, the most dangerous enemy currently faced by the Muslims. He also noted that the issue of Israel is not the top priority for government institutions, which prefer dealing with other issues while ignoring the role of Zionism as the root of all social, cultural, and political problems faced by Muslims. He took issue with the fact that researchers of Zionism need to single-handedly fund the research, publication, and distribution of their studies, and that even the religious seminaries lack the infrastructure required in order to conduct research in this field.

He called on young students and researchers to turn into reality the instructions of the Supreme Leader, who had ruled it necessary to adapt the education and research system of the religious seminaries to the needs of the society. If this is done, Ebrahim-Nia said, the enemy will know that the entire Muslim nation is committed to implementing the Supreme Leader's instructions, and will not even dare threaten a military attack (RASA News, November 30).

## Pictures of the week: procession of Basij members for Basij Week



ISNA/PHOTO: ABDOLVAHED MIRZAZADEH



ISNA

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