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Politics & Economics: Iran President Writes Bush, Offers 'New Solutions'

Lengthy Letter Barely Cites Current Nuclear Standoff; Rice Seeks U.N. Resolution

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WASHINGTON -- Iran's president wrote an 18-page letter to President Bush, calling on him to "return to the teachings of the prophets," just as the U.S. and Europe began a new push to isolate Tehran for its nuclear activities.

An Iranian official yesterday characterized the letter from hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as containing "new solutions for getting out of international problems," briefly sparking hopes that Tehran might be offering a way out of the stand off.

But the letter, a copy of which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, makes only a passing reference to Iran's nuclear program -- referred to only as "technological and scientific achievement" -- while devoting pages to castigating the U.S. for occupying Iraq, holding prisoners without trial in Guantanamo Bay, supporting Israel and a host of other alleged misdeeds.

"Do such actions correspond to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the tenets of human rights?" the Iranian president wrote in the letter, which was filled with religious references.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in an interview with the Associated Press, dismissed the letter, saying that "it isn't addressing the issues that we're dealing with in a concrete way."

The Iranians have a history of floating compromises, usually in the days or hours before they face possible international censure. The strategy has proved successful, postponing punishment while doing little to slow the country's nuclear efforts.

Any hint that Tehran may be willing to compromise would almost certainly stiffen the resistance of Russia and China to any punishments for Iran. And it could give new voice to European critics who have argued that there can be no solution without direct negotiations between the U.S. and Iran.

Speaking privately, U.S. officials said they were baffled about why the Iranian president had decided to write this sort of letter -- or why his advisers, many of whom have far more experience with the West -- had allowed it to be sent. U.S. officials said they didn't expect it to affect the current diplomatic maneuvering.

Last night, Secretary Rice was to host a dinner in New York with her counterparts from Britain, France, Russia and China -- the veto-wielding members of the U.N. Security Council -- and Germany.

The Western powers want the Security Council to pass a "Chapter VII" resolution that would order Iran to halt production of enriched uranium, usable for nuclear fuel or potentially a bomb. Russia and China have resisted, fearing that such a resolution could open the way for economic sanctions or military action.

Yesterday's letter makes a series of highly emotional charges against the U.S., including the suggestion that the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks could likely not have taken place "without coordination" or "infiltration" of U.S. intelligence services. "Of course this is just an educated guess," it says.

In its sole reference to Iran's nuclear program, the letter asks "Why is it that any technological and scientific achievement" in the Middle East is portrayed as a threat to the Zionist regime?" And it links "lies" about Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction to allegations about Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology.