



A 'New' New World Order?

August 6, 2008 **Ilan I. Berman** *The Washington Times*

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Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is at it again. In late July, Iran's firebrand president used a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) in Tehran as the platform for a renewed call to arms in the Third World. In his remarks before the summit, Mr. Ahmadinejad blamed the West for everything from the spread of AIDS to nuclear proliferation, and called on the NAM countries to band together to create an alternative to the United Nations as a way of becoming "the pioneer of peace and justice in the world."

Mr. Ahmadinejad's rhetoric, so reminiscent of Cold War calls by penny-ante radicals for a "world revolution," would be amusing if it were not so serious. Since coming to power in 2005, Mr. Ahmadinejad has consistently used his populist bona fides to lobby against Western "imperialism" among many of the countries of the Third World. In his 2006 address before the U.N. General Assembly, for example, he declared that "many global arrangements have become unjust, discriminatory and irresponsible as a result of undue pressure from certain powers," and urged the assembled nations to reject the new-read Western-dominated-world order.

And Third World nations have responded. Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez, for one, has made bolstering ties with Tehran a top priority of his regime. He has backed Iran in the international standoff over its nuclear ambitions, and worked to expand trade and energy ties with the Islamic republic—greatly complicating international efforts to put economic pressure on Iran in the process. The goal of this growing union is clear: to roll back the power of the United States and its allies. "If the U.S. empire succeeds in consolidating its dominance, then the humankind has no future," Mr. Chavez told an audience in the Iranian capital during his July 2006 visit there. "Therefore, we have to save the humankind and put an end to the U.S. empire."

Nor is Mr. Chavez the only one. The government of President Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua is also drifting into Tehran's orbit. Earlier this year, as part of its growing links to Managua, Iran pledged some \$500 million in expanded trade and established a diplomatic mission in order to broaden diplomacy and tourism with the Latin American country. Tehran is also said to be heavily invested in the construction of a \$350 million deepwater port on Nicaragua's eastern seaboard. These moves have led some U.S. observers to warn of a potential Iranian intelligence beachhead in the Western Hemisphere. "They use their embassies to smuggle in weapons. They used them to develop and execute plans," Oliver "Buck" Revell, a former FBI associate deputy director, has told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "[The Iranian presence] is definitely an area that will be of concern to our national security apparatus."

With the help of Bolivian President Evo Morales, Iran is also reportedly planning to launch a new media offensive "for all of Latin America." The initiative, which will take the form of a television station based in the foothills of the Andes mountains in Bolivia, is intended to promote Iranian solidarity with "the great struggle of [the region's] peasant movement," Mr. Morales announced in February upon formally unveiling the plan.

Iran is also branching out in Africa. Over the past year, the Islamic republic has bolstered its presence on the African continent by expanding its economic contacts with Eritrea, its strategic cooperation with Senegal and its political support for the repressive government of Zimbabwe's brutal dictator, Robert Mugabe. This is because, as Middle East scholar Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute has put it, "with successive U.S. administrations and European governments effectively ignoring Africa, Tehran sees its African countries as diplomatic easy picking."

These and similar inroads are proof that Mr. Ahmadinejad's confident claim to the NAM ministers that "[t]he big powers are going down," and "the world is on the verge of entering a new, promising era" represents more than simply wishful thinking. Rather, it is a concrete strategic agenda that the Iranian president has set about putting into practice.