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Trends. Albright's Asia Society Speech: President Khatami's Reaction

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United States (U.S.) Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's June 17, 1998 speech to members of the Asia Society has been interpreted by Western journalists as a strong overture to improve relations between the US and Iran. Significant pretexts for this overture are alleged to be changes in Iranian domestic and international policy that are compatible with U.S. foreign policy and wrought by President Mohammad Khatami. How might President Khatami react to the speech?

"Madeleine," he might say. "what are you trying to do? Hand my head to my conservative adversaries? Already my ally, the mayor of Tehran, has been accused of illegalities, briefly imprisoned, and is now standing trial. My minister of the interior is under attack as are other of my supporters. A number of initiatives that I have tried to take have been prevented, stymied, or rendered useless by the rahbar-e moazam (Supreme Leader) Ayatollah Khomeini. The greatest weapon my adversaries have is to accuse me of forsaking the guidance of Ayatollah Khomeini and the revolution for the temptations of the Great Satan. And what happens? The Great Satan tries to make nice to Iran with me as the pretext. Have you read Paradise Lost, Madeleine?"

"And Madeleine, do you know how to make nice? It's not by remembering Kermit Roosevelt's subversion of free Iranian elections. It's not by invoking U.S. support for the Shah. It's not by rubbing salt in the wounds of my adversaries by bringing up my winning the last election with almost 70% of the votes. It's not by exhorting more personal liberty and greater openness for women. And the backhanded compliments! 'Iran's record in the war on drugs has greatly improved--at least within its own borders.' Thanks."

"And then the same old vitriolic attacks. 'Iran's support for terrorism has not yet ceased; serious violations of human rights persist; and its efforts to develop long range missiles and to acquire nuclear weapons continue.' The Israelis can get away with all of this because they live in a tough neighborhood, but we can't? So your efforts to prevent Iran from being involved in export pipelines for Caspian Sea oil and gas will persist? You say you are not anti-Islamic, just anti-Iranian policies. You mean like we're not anti-Semitic just anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli policies?"

"Then you finish by quoting my desire for 'a world in which misunderstandings can be overcome and mutual respect and logic govern relations among states.' Madeleine, your misunderstanding of Iranian domestic politics endangers my agenda and even my life. You show us no respect and exhibit no logic. And you want to improve the relationship? Wait. Now I get it. Your speech must be part of some disinformation program aligned with efforts to beam radio propaganda into Iran. And the program must have been vetted by some of those Central Intelligence Agency holdovers from the Shah's days. Very clever, Madeleine." (See Crossette, B. (June 18, 1998). Albright in overture to Iran, seeks a 'road map' to amity. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Fabry, J. (1982). Some practical hints about paradoxical intention. *International Forum for Logotherapy*, 5, 25-29; Frankel, V.E. (1975). Paradoxical intention and dereflection. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 12, 226-237; Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright at the 1998 Asia Society Dinner, New York. (June 17, 1998).

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<http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/albright.html>.) (Keywords: Asia Society, Iran, Madeleine Albright, Mohammad Khatami, United States.)