

Akbar Ganji Says Military Attack on Iran Would Destroy Opposition

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[Akbar Ganji](#), the celebrated Iranian journalist and former political prisoner who will be honored with the Cato Institute's Milton Friedman Liberty Prize for 2010 Thursday, spoke at the National Press Club here Monday, and, while he didn't break any especially new ground, it's worth noting a few things that he said about his views of the implications of policy options the U.S. faces vis-a-vis Tehran in the coming months.

First, he stressed, "democracy and human rights have taken root in Iran" despite the actions of increasingly arbitrary and iron-fisted rule of the current regime. "A military attack (on Iran) would destroy all of that," he declared. The Green Movement, which Ganji obviously supports, would "melt away" if such an attack took place. In that context, he noted that the Bush administration's military threats against Iran made it impossible for the Green Movement to emerge. But "the mere fact that Obama didn't make military threats made the Green Movement possible," Ganji said.

With respect to economic sanctions, Ganji noted that the Green Movement consists mostly of middle-class adherents and that "economic sanctions would destroy the middle class (and) ... the Green Movement." In any event, he went on, "the more economic sanctions are applied against Iran, the more the government will control the economy" due to the prevailing structures.

As to providing direct or indirect U.S. assistance to the Green Movement or other opposition sectors, Ganji was also very skeptical. "Any foreign intervention," he said, "is bound to hurt us. (If it involves) any funding, people will look at us as mercenaries." What the opposition needs, he went on, is "emotional and moral support." In that respect the western media have a key role to play, he said, adding that Ahmadinejad quite deliberately provokes the press by taking the most radical positions — specifically, asserting that the Holocaust did not exist and that Israel should not exist. "It's a game he always wins," because that's what the press keeps asking him about. "No one asks him about the situation in Iran" regarding human rights or the economy. "This is the direct help you can bring," he told the dozen or so journalists who attended his presentation.
