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Iran leader issues stern warning to opposition

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By Zahra Hosseinian and Reza Derakhshi

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran's supreme leader told the opposition on Friday they would face a harsh response if they drew their "swords" against the ruling establishment.

The warning from Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, delivered at Friday prayers three months after a disputed poll that led to widespread unrest, was a clear message he would not tolerate any threat to Iran's clerical system of government.

"Resisting the system and taking out the sword against the system will be followed by a harsh response," he told worshippers in a sermon broadcast live on state television.

"If somebody stands against the basis of the (Islamic) system and violates people's security, the system is forced to stand against it," he said.

But in his lengthy sermon Khamenei did not address proposals that Tehran on Wednesday delivered to world powers involved in efforts to resolve the issue diplomatically, but reiterated that the Islamic state should not back down on its "nuclear rights."

"It is a sign of deviation to give up one's rights, nuclear rights or non-nuclear rights, instead of insisting on them," he said.

But Khamenei, who has final say on all matters of state, added criticism and differences among officials were acceptable.

It was Khamenei's first Friday prayers sermon since the June poll, when he endorsed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election, blamed the opposition for bloodshed and accused Western powers of interfering in Iran's affairs.

The election and its turbulent aftermath plunged Iran into its deepest internal crisis since the 1979 Islamic revolution, exposing deepening divisions within its ruling elites and adding to tension with the West.

The opposition said 70 people were killed in the unrest while officials put the death toll at up to 36 people.

Rights groups say thousands of people, including senior pro-reform figures, were arrested after the presidential poll. Most have been freed but more than 200 remain in jail, according to the opposition.

This week the authorities detained three pro-reform figures allied to opposition leader and defeated candidate Mirhossein Mousavi. They also closed down the offices of reformist cleric Mehdi Karoubi, another presidential contender in June.

Mousavi and Karoubi say the poll was rigged to secure Ahmadinejad's re-election. Officials reject the charge.

The hardline president shored up his position last week when parliament approved most of his new ministers after almost three months of political turmoil in the major oil exporter.

NUCLEAR DISPUTE GOES TO U.N.

Ahmadinejad is due to attend the U.N. General Assembly in New York this month where Iran's nuclear program will dominate behind-the-scene

deliberations.

The Iranian proposal offers wide-ranging talks with the West but is silent about its nuclear program, which the West suspects may be a cover for developing nuclear weapons. Iran says the program's aim is solely to produce electrical power.

Instead of directly addressing those concerns, Iran's five-page proposal spoke generally of talks on political, security, international and economic issues.

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said on Friday he was seeking an urgent meeting with Iran's top nuclear negotiator Dr Saeed Jalili after consulting the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany over the proposals.

U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley called the proposals a "warmed-over version" of a previous paper that broke no new ground but said the U.S. administration believed the only way to resolve the issue was through "direct dialogue."

"If we have talks, we will plan to bring up the nuclear issue," Crowley said. "We hope ... that Iran will choose to engage the international community, to address the concerns that we have about the nuclear program."

Western powers are becoming frustrated by what they have called Tehran's "persistent defiance and point-blank refusal" to suspend uranium enrichment and its avoidance of negotiations as demanded by U.N. Security Council resolutions since 2006.

U.S. President Barack Obama has suggested Iran may face much harsher international sanctions, possibly targeting its imports of gasoline, if it does not accept good-faith negotiations by the end of September.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, whose country has veto power in the U.N. Security Council, said the Iranian proposal provided something to work with, and he ruled out the possibility of sanctions on Iran's lifeblood oil sector.

Among the issues Iran said it was willing to discuss was "putting into action real and fundamental programs toward complete disarmament and preventing development and proliferation of nuclear, chemical and microbial weapons."

Iran, the world's fifth biggest crude producer, is seen as vulnerable to oil sanctions because it imports 40 percent of its gasoline to supply the cheap fuel that Iranians see as their birthright.

(Additional reporting by Reza Derakhshi and Fedrik Dahl in Tehran, [Arshad Mohammed](#) and [David Alexander](#) in Washington, [Janet McBride](#) in Moscow, [Louis Charbonneau](#) at the United Nations and Bate Felix in Brussels; Writing by [Samia Nakhoul](#) and Elizabeth Fullerton)

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