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10 Questions for Ahmadinejad

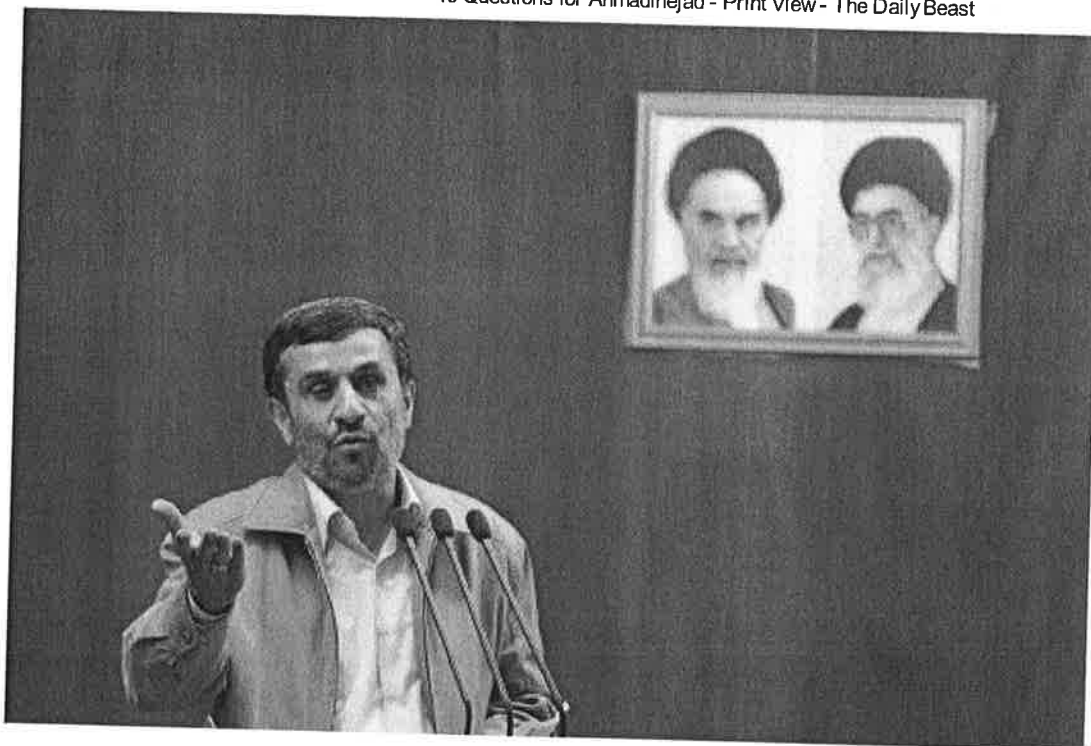
Instead of letting Ahmadinejad spout out lies and vitriol, here's what the media should be asking.

by [Abbas Milani \(/contributors/abbas-milani.html\)](http://www.thedailybeast.com/contributors/abbas-milani.html) | September 18, 2011 1:59 PM EDT

Once again September is upon us and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is about to make his yearly pilgrimage to the mecca of international media for the U.N. General Assembly. He is a narcissist addicted to the glare of the camera, and every time he comes to New York and rehashes his inanities against the Holocaust, about Sept. 11 as an American conspiracy, about Iran having no homosexuals, or, tragically, about Iran as a genuine democracy, he gets more than his needed “fix” of camera time. Nearly every major media outlet competes to “interview” him. Those afforded the chance are usually carefully chosen based on a past record of staying clear of hard-probing questions and follow-ups. An American-trained retired professor is among his media advisers.

This time he comes with clipped wings. It is even possible that he will be impeached this week. Now is the time for the media to ask questions with impunity—he may well not be coming back next year. He has little to do with setting nuclear policy—contrary to much hype—and it is the corrupt, closed society he created that must come under scrutiny. These are the questions he must be forced to reckon with:

1. Your administration came to power on the platform of fighting corruption and nepotism; you now stand accused by your own country’s judiciary, media, Parliament, and even your own brother, of having the most corrupt regime in the post-shah era. Your son’s father-in-law has been appointed by you to more than 13 key positions, with billions of dollars of funds at his disposal, and he now stands accused of complicity in a \$3 billion heist, as well as theft of antiquities. Your brother and many in the official Iranian media accuse your confidants of voodoo and devil worship. What say you to these allegations?
2. When the Islamic Republic of Iran took over the country, virtually every socioeconomic category—from real economic growth to life expectancy—was on par with Turkey. Now Turkey is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and Iran is its junior economic partner. Is it true that economic statistics, like growth of GNP, inflation, and unemployment, are so disastrous that you have ordered the government to keep them secret?



AP Photo

3. You have repeatedly claimed that in Iran no one is in prison for their political views, but as we speak your two opponents in the last contested election have been in prison for 178 days, with no indictment; dozens of top journalists, politicians, and public intellectuals have suffered similar fates; and only last Thursday, a young doctoral student of sociology was humiliated by receiving 50 lashes in Evin prison simply because she had been a volunteer in Moussavi's campaign. Do you deny these claims?
4. What say you to the fact that members of a pious Sufi sect, Gonabadi Darvishes, members of the Sunni minority, and also members of the Bahai faith have all been persecuted under your administration—Darvishes and Bahai leaders been put in prison, Sunni mosques destroyed, and Sunni leaders banned from holding religious ceremonies?
5. Your critics, which now include websites close to the IRGC (Jahan and Javan online) and to Khamenei (Keyhan), accuse you of trying to create controversy in your New York trip as a way to deflect attention from the problems your allies and advisers face at home. Is that why you are raising the issue of war reparations for the Allied occupation of parts of Iran in World War II?

It's about time the media forced Ahmadinejad to answer for his actions rather than allow him to use airtime to stir up fear abroad and strengthen his position at home.
6. What say you to the fact that in the years leading up to the Second World War many of Iran's clerics cooperated with Nazi propaganda, and offered succor to the Nazi-sympathizing Mufti of Jerusalem?
7. Your government has been oblivious to the grave ecological dangers faced by your country. The Zayandeh Rude River in Isfahan has dried up; the drying up of Lake Orumiye will affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iranians living in the area. Why have you, in spite of your much-touted trips around every province, ignored these grave problems?

8. There are increasing signs of your government enforcing sex segregation in Iran in general and universities in particular; there are also indications of the Parliament's intent to pass laws that limit women's rights to higher education. What will you do to counter this?

9. In recent Zogby polls, Iran has only 14 percent support among Muslims of the region, while Turkey's model of secular, democratic governance in an Islamic society is gaining more and more power and popularity. With Turkey's star on the rise and your ally Ayatollah Sistani, Shiism's highest-ranking cleric in the world, refusing to create a clerical regime in Iraq, and with Syrian despot Assad on the ropes, what do you think is the future of Iran's style of clerical absolute rule?

10. Do you think you will be impeached before the end of your tenure? You have repeatedly threatened that you will take action when your redlines are crossed. What are these redlines, and what do you plan to do? Why did you think you could take on Khamenei and the IRGC?

At no other time has Iran faced a greater crisis of authority. At no other time has its leadership been so vulnerable. And the people of Iran are suffering. It's about time the media forced Ahmadinejad to answer for his actions rather than allow him to use airtime to stir up fear abroad and strengthen his position at home.

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