

Mideast situation deteriorating

# Time running out for Iran on nuclear issues: Expert

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: "The time is running out [for Iran] and we are coming closer to the moment of truth," said a senior international strategic advisory official yesterday. Speaking to reporters about the Iranian nuclear issue on the sidelines of the seventh 'Global Strategy Conference,' which began yesterday and ends later today, Claude Smadja, the President of Smaja &

The conference, being held in coordination with the Jusoor Arabiya Leadership and Consultancy Center, is a global strategy conference focusing on the Arab world and attempting to define the region's identity and balance its domestic and external relations with the political and economic implications for the states in the region.

During the conference, the Smaja Group, which is in Kuwait especially for the annual event, is focusing on discussing the issues and challenges facing the region.

"The situation is...fast deteriorating between the west and Iran and is quite alarming," he said, adding, "We want to know how this situation will evolve, especially [in its effects on] the stability in the region." The Obama administration has attempted to implement a policy of extending the hand of friendship towards this region, he stressed.

"In the next two or three months, I think something will happen; either there will be another set



KUWAIT: Claude Smadja addressing the meeting.  
— Photo by Joseph Shagra

of sanctions, or Tehran will abide by the requirement to change their strategy on nuclear programs," Smaja continued. "The problem with the Iranian regime is that their actions are completely different from what they are telling us."

Smaja noted that the timing of this year's conference is very important as it is taking place after

the completion of President Obama's first year in office.

"Remember that Arab world has huge expectation about Obama administration with respect to relations between the US and the Islamic world," he stressed. "The Arab-Israeli conflict and Palestinian issues are at the forefront, but unfortunately this expectation did not

materialize. The question for many in the Arab world now is, 'Should we expect more or should we readjust instead?' Even on this issue, time is running out," he added ominously. Besides the Iranian nuclear issue, the conference agenda includes discussion of the Middle East after the global financial storm, the prospects for Iraq after US combat troops leave the country and the forthcoming election there, along with stabilization and normalization, new oil production opportunities and predictions for Iraq's future three to five years from now.

"This is timely as well to assess how Iraq is turning the page after the American presence," said Smaja. "This year is very important in Iraq as they are two important issues that they need to face this year. One is about the US combat troops' departure and the election period. This year as well, we want to discuss how Iraqis are building governance and structure there."

On the global financial crisis and its impact on the Middle East, Smaja noted that although some countries in the region as coping well following the crisis, this year will still be a very difficult period for the Middle East.

"The impact of the global crisis is still being felt very hard in the region. Banks are still suffering up to now and many international companies are very careful on their prospective investments," he stated, asserting that the consequence of this caution is "less investment, less development. The oil price is still high and so, overall, this year will still be difficult for many countries in the region."

Dr Shafiq Al-Ghabra, the President of Jusoor Arabia emphasized that this year's conference is taking place under exceptional circumstances. "Iran and the USA, Iraq, Palestinian, Yemen and the challenges of economic transition have had a remarkable impact on the participation of many global experts," he said.