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By DAVID E. SANGER and DAVID S. CLOUD

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By MICHAEL SLACKMAN

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Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times

## Within Bounds, Iran Offers a Congenial Glow

By WARREN HOGGE

Javad Zarif, Iran's ambassador to the U.N., is nearing the end of five years confined within 25 miles of New York.

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By EDWARD WYATT and IAN AUSTEN

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By MICHELINE MAYNARD

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Graphic: Small Cars Are Big Again

The New York Times

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# Within 25 Miles of New York, Iran Offers a Congenial Glow

By WARREN HOGE

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UNITED NATIONS



Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times  
Javad Zarif is the United Nations

ambassador from Iran.

JAVAD ZARIF has appeared at universities, public policy forums and social and political clubs so often that Lisa Anderson, dean of Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs, recently asked him wryly if he was thinking of running for office.

Mr. Zarif is the United Nations ambassador from Iran, a country that has had no diplomatic relations with the United States since 1980, and he is confined by the American authorities within a 25-mile radius of Columbus Circle. Punctuating the point, a map in

the Iranian Mission shows the boundaries as Parsippany, N.J., the New York-Connecticut border and Exit 40 on the Long Island Expressway.

State Department demarcations? he was asked.

"No," he said, smiling beneath a Koranic inscription in his ambassadorial office. "Everything here in the U.S. is private, isn't it? We had Hagstrom's do it."

Brand names, local geography and American customs come easily to Mr. Zarif, 47, who has spent most of his adult life in this country and speaks colloquial English with an American accent.

His ability to strike cordial relations with many American leaders and with the crowds of Americans he frequently addresses, while defending a country whose leadership they have no sympathy for, is being much commented on as his five years of service come to an end.

He has degrees from San Francisco State University and a doctorate from the University of Denver, and his American-born son and daughter now study in the United States.

Though he dresses in austere Iranian style, with a high-buttoned collarless shirt and no necktie, and follows the Iranian practice of not shaking hands with women, he is disarmingly informal and punctuates his comments with chuckles and grins.

He has combined this beguiling ease with communication tools like video- and telephone-conferencing and Web postings ([www.zarif.net](http://www.zarif.net)) to influence the American-Iranian relationship.

YET Mr. Zarif also represents a country that is locked in a contentious standoff with the West over its nuclear program, has harassed and recently jailed three Iranian-American intellectuals, and is led by a president, **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**, who has declared that Israel should be "wiped off the map" and that the Holocaust should be questioned.

“It’s a dilemma for any diplomat to bring the right balance between defending his government and not defending the indefensible,” said Dimitri K. Simes, president of the Nixon Center, which studies national security issues. “I think he was able to find such a balance.”

Mr. Zarif became Iran’s chief representative in the United States by an accident that he traces back to the [Immigration](#) and Naturalization Service.

He was born into a well-to-do family with textile and trade interests in Tehran, and his wife’s family had extensive real estate holdings, some of which it lost in the 1979 revolution. But neither family was politically involved, he said, so there were no further consequences.

When he came to this country on a student visa in 1976, he was preparing for a teaching career in Iran. But just after he passed his comprehensive tests for his Ph.D. in Denver in 1985, the Immigration and Naturalization Service withdrew his visa, dooming his chances to pursue the degree.

Still wanting to remain here legally, he went to New York and took a job in the Iranian Mission. He fulfilled his degree requirements long distance over the next three years, and by then he had proven his worth to the government, which asked him to join the foreign service.

“So I’m a diplomat both by default and by the decision of the I.N.S.,” he said.

Mr. Zarif lives in an elegant French neo-Classical Fifth Avenue townhouse built in 1912, which Iran purchased in the 1960s and which was the site of lavish parties during the shah’s time. “We may not serve champagne anymore,” he said, “but we make up for it with very good Iranian food.”

One of his dinner guests there last year was [James A. Baker III](#), the former secretary of state and co-chairman of the Iraq Study Group, which soon after recommended establishing direct communication with Iran.

DURING his years in New York, he says, he has been so busy making addresses that he has had little time to experience the city or join the diplomatic party circuit. “Also, however I am seen here in New York, I am a religious person, and my wife and I have certain religious limitations on the food we can eat, on the company we can entertain, and we observe those, both personally and officially,” he said.

On weekends, he does grocery shopping with his wife and takes walks through Central Park. “If I want relaxation, that’s how I get it,” he said.

In his public appearances he is listened to respectfully and often applauded warmly. “I know that what I am saying is not exactly what they want to hear, but I do not see any problem in establishing genuine communication with a whole lot of Americans,” he said.

Part of his appeal is the tantalizing suspicion that he contests the extreme views of Mr. Ahmadinejad.

In his speeches and interviews, however, Mr. Zarif is a tough advocate for Iran.

On the Holocaust, Mr. Zarif argues that Mr. Ahmadinejad was not questioning whether it had occurred but merely saying that the Palestinians wrongly bore the consequences of it. “The Palestinians had nothing to do with this crime — and it was a crime, it must be condemned, it should never be repeated,” he said. “This is what I say to audiences here.”

He also says he believes that the United States is fabricating evidence to back up its accusation that Iran is sending bombs and weapons into Iraq.

As for the nuclear impasse, he says that the West refused to negotiate during the two years that Iran agreed to suspend its uranium enrichment, and that Iran has lost faith in negotiations.

Asked if he would also fault the Iranian approach, Mr. Zarif acknowledged only, “We might have contributed to the misunderstanding by not explaining our case in the best possible way.”

Critics of Iran, like [John R. Bolton](#), the former American ambassador to the United Nations, say Mr. Zarif’s charm is an unreliable barometer of Tehran’s true intentions. “The Foreign Ministry of Iran is the last place that is going to know, and it makes it easier for Zarif to tell untruths with a completely straight face because he doesn’t know,” Mr. Bolton said.

As for reports that hard-liners view him suspiciously at home, Mr. Zarif said, “Some people would consider that my vocabulary is inappropriate, and they attack me for my tone and say I try to be too accommodating.”

As he heads off to realize his original wish to be a teacher at Tehran University, does he think his effort here to bridge the gap has been successful?

“I would be satisfied if I have helped in the creation of just a dent in the misunderstanding,” he said. “And I think I have.”