

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

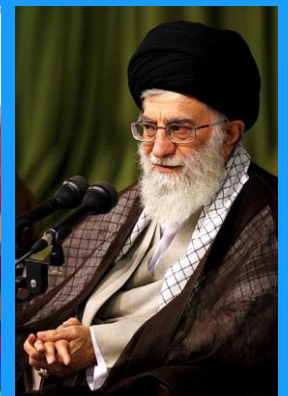
MAGAZINE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Though at pains not to transgress political correctness, a new United Nations report unveils the high-handedness characterising Israeli economic policies towards the occupied Palestinian territory.



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Nuclear Abolition News and Analysis

Obama Magic is Gone – Caution Outweighs Zeal

Nuclear Abolition News | IDN

By RAMESH JAURA*

BERLIN (IDN) - President Barack Obama's commitment four years ago 'to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons' reverberated across the globe generating hope that humankind will not be annihilated by a sheer flash of light. On June 19 in Berlin he sought to build on the iconic Prague speech. But there was no magic filling the air.



The reason, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) General Secretary Kate Hudson wrote on June 28 in her [blog](#): "... despite Obama's apparent continued commitment to the goal of global abolition, he did not quite take us to the dizzy heights of hope and emotion stirred by his Prague speech in 2009." [P] [JAPANESE TEXT PDF](#)

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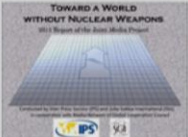
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Nuclear Deterrence Works in Indo-Pak Ties



Nuclear Abolition News | IDN

By A. VINOD KUMAR*

NEW DELHI (IDN | IDSA) - For over two decades, a dominant section of western analysts harped on the volatilities of the India and Pakistan nuclear dyad, often overselling the 'South Asia as a nuclear flashpoint' axiom, and portending a potential nuclear flare-up in every major stand-off between the two countries. The turbulence in the sub-continent propelled such presages, with one crisis after another billowing towards serious confrontations, but eventually easing out on all occasions.

While the optimists described this as evidence of nuclear deterrence gradually consolidating in this

dyad, the pessimists saw in it the ingredients of instability that could lead to a nuclear conflict.

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UN Downplays Health Effects of Nuclear Radiation

Nuclear Abolition News | IPS

By GEORGE GAO

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - The United Nations has come under criticism from medical experts and members of civil society for what these critics consider inaccurate statements about the effects of lingering radioactivity on local populations.

Scientists and doctors met with top U.N. officials last week to discuss the effects of radioactivity in Japan and Ukraine, and the U.N. has enlisted several of its agencies, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the U.N. Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), to address the matter.

In May, UNSCEAR stated that radiation exposure following the 2011 Fukushima-Daichii nuclear disaster in Japan poses "no immediate health risks" and that long-term health risks are "unlikely". [P] [JAPANESE TEXT VERSION PDF](#)

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Beyond Nuclear
Non-Proliferation
A Monthly Newsletter for
Strengthening
Awareness of Nuclear
Abolition

In order to strengthen public awareness of the urgent need for nuclear abolition, the Tokyo-based Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a Buddhist association, and the Inter Press Service global news agency have initiated a media project which aims to help to shed light on the issue of nuclear abolition from the perspectives of civil society through the global media network of IPS and beyond. As part of this project, IDN InDepthNews, the news analysis service of the Globalom Media group, in partnership with the Global Cooperation Council, has launched this special website.

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Ernest Corea and Ramesh Jaura

Cover Picture
Muslim men prostrating during
prayer in a mosque.
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

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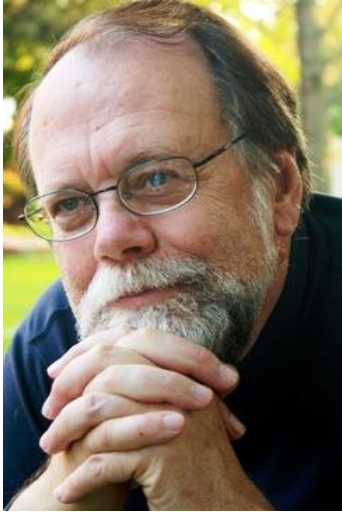
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CONSIDER THIS

Peace is Child's Play

By O. Fred Donaldson*



TRUMBULL, CT, USA - Albert Einstein asks, "Is the universe friendly?"

A sign in Mother Teresa's children's home in Calcutta is a Zen-like reply to Einstein's question: "Take time to play, take time to love and be loved."

Instead of answering the question, the sign tells us what to do in order to discover the answer for ourselves.

Theologians, poets, scientists and philosophers have looked out into the world through the peephole of our finite humanity hoping to see the infinite face of Creation, and have struggled eloquently to make sense of the universe and find our peace in it.

While many scientists and sages acknowledge that a sustaining pattern of unity exists in life, they haven't known how to develop it. Nor do they know where to look to find it.

Despite the hints given by Jesus, Buddha and Gandhi, we've been looking for peace in all the wrong places. Embodied peace already exists where we have never thought to seriously search—within children's original play. Elie Wiesel calls children "bearer[s] of promise." What's the promise? This promise is described in a deceptively simple sentence—peace is child's play. The promise is that the birth of every child is life's way of giving us the opportunity for a profound and until now unheeded behavioral paradigm shift from a contest world of won to a playful world of one. Children dismissed as nothing more than ciphers turn out to be the bearers of life's most important promise—peace. The peace we are seeking involves a sort of pilgrimage whose goal is to return to our origins and in so doing become who we really are.

A Natural Gift

Children's original play is not an artifact of culture, but rather an enthusiastic gift from Creation to all life. This enthusiasm in its original sense of "engoddedness," being filled with God, is what makes original play original. In our original play, unity is embodied and experienced as a deep pattern of belonging that reprograms basic and enduring psychophysiological postures. Imagine, for example, a world with no winning or losing, no fault and no revenge. Such a world may seem unbelievable, but children have shown me that it is not unlivable.

Nelson Mandela wrote, "In South Africa children must be able to play again." Why? Because their original play is a contract with the human spirit that reinstates the original

meaning of childhood into the direction and growth of human life, thereby fulfilling childhood's promise of peace. Original play's inherent kindness is a breathtakingly ingenious neural pattern recognition system that "remaps" the brain, destructuring, deprogramming and deconditioning fear while promoting neural plasticity and strengthening specific neurological circuits that generate peacefulness, awareness and compassion. Original play is an innate ecological intelligence in which we share the rapture of being alive, an ineffable experience where reality is the same in oneself as in everyone else, and where action emerges out of the present moment without reflection, where one knows how one should relate spontaneously, without thinking.

Being Human

Forty years ago, children seized my imagination, bringing me little of what I expect, but quite a bit of what has proven to be what I need. Their enthusiastic play is a kind of graceful triage as they teach me again and again to widen my circle of compassion to embrace all life. In doing so, they haven't made my life easier; they've made it more holy—and that is more difficult. They show me that I am not who I think I am, but rather who I pretend I cannot become. And by that, I am made greater in my imagination and my humanity.

One morning, in the midst of a lecture to educators and social workers in Manila, eight street children were brought to play with me as a demonstration. As I crawled toward the children, they squealed and ran around the mats. Their tentative touch evolved into jumping on my back and running into my arms. One of the teenage girls smiled shyly, but stood back from our play. The teenager who was playing reached out to her hesitant friend with the invitation, "Come, it's OK. He's human too."

*O. Fred Donaldson PhD is a play specialist who is internationally recognized for his research and use of play with children and animals for 40 years. He has coined the term "original play" to describe his work. He is a consultant to families, educational, social service, health and environment organizations, as well as corporations and athletic groups. He is the author of *Playing by Heart*. See www.originalplay.eu. This article first appeared in 'SGI Quarterly' in July 2013 and is being reproduced with the author's due permission

Some months later I sat in a school playground in Athlone, a township near Cape Town. Curious and excited, the young children surrounded me. A small boy squeezed through the others and crawled into my lap. He wrapped his tiny arms around me and snuggled in close in the midst of the crowding, jostling and laughing children. The bell signaled the children to line up; the little boy continued hugging me. After a few moments he got up, waved and walked into school.

A teacher who had observed us asked if I knew about the little boy in my lap. She said that he had been at the school for only a week. He was brought to the school after he was found tied up in a black plastic bag and thrown away in a pile of trash. I turned away and looked through tears back out onto the playground.

In original play, nothing is acquired theoretically; everything is experienced. The result of such practice is a sense of kindness that can be communicated to all life.

During a break in a New York City workshop for gang members, an 18-year-old asked me, "Can you help me not to fight? When someone touches me, I hit without thinking. I'm tired of fighting and talking to the principal and the police every day." I asked him if he would come up in front of the others with me after the break. He agreed. We stood facing each other. I asked him, "Can I push you?" He nodded yes. I pushed him. He merely shifted his feet. "Can I push you harder?" He shrugged and nodded. I shoved him harder. Reflexively, his right fist shot toward my face. I deflected his

fist with the back of my hand, bringing it down to my chest where I held it softly. We hugged and sat down.

When I sat down, the young woman sitting next to me whispered, "Did you see his eyes?"

I nodded. He was crying. The teenager's reflexive response to touch was aggression. This time, however, there was no victim, no aggressor, no blame and no revenge. This is the promise of original play. The young man later asked me, "Can I learn to do this with children?"

"Of course," I said. We hugged again and went our separate ways. But not as separate as before.

By the sheer force of their loving, these children refuse to give in to suffering. I felt from them no blame, no anger, no fear nor revenge. Their willingness to embrace difference and not retreat in fear takes great courage. They ask nothing more from me than the courage to return their love. Together we make conflict obsolete.

A five-year-old, David, once said to me, "Play is when we don't know that we are different from each other." Children teach me that original play is a pact with Creation, hidden in the profusion and diversity of life. As another five-year-old boy said after playing, "Real play is when no one is crying and no one has a broken heart." Rumi advised us to "Gamble everything for love." Go ahead. Join us. Play as if your life depends on it. It does. □



DISARMAMENT

Hiroshima and Nagasaki Beckon Nuke Free World

By Ramesh Jaura



Visitors to the Hiroshima exhibition | Credit: SGI

BERLIN | HIROSHIMA - “World leaders, high-ranking UN officials, city mayors and representatives of the civil society from around the globe, gathered for a summit at Hiroshima and Nagasaki to mark the seventieth anniversary of the atom bombing of two Japanese cities, declared that nuclear weapons will be outlawed by 2020, and called upon all governments to agree at the earliest on a nuclear weapons convention.”

A press release in August 2015 might read somewhat like this if the momentum building up for ushering in a world free of nuclear weapons continues and Soka Gakkai International (SGI) President (right) Daisaku Ikeda’s proposal for a nuclear abolition summit to be held in 2015 on the anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is translated into action.

He reiterated the proposal in a message to an exhibition titled ‘Everything You Treasure: For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons’ on September 24, 2013 in Hiroshima City, “an eternal bastion of peace”, as he termed it. SGI – with members in 192 countries and territories around the world – has been engaged in peace activities since the public call at the height of the Cold War in 1957 by its second president Josei Toda for prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons,

In the 1980s, with the support of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, SGI created the exhibition ‘Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World’, aiming to raise public awareness of the grave consequences of nuclear weapons. As part of a campaign to support the United Nations, the exhibition toured different parts of the world including the nuclear weapons states.



In 2007, SGI launched its grassroots antinuclear campaign ‘People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition’, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the antinuclear declaration made by Toda. The exhibition ‘From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Toward a World Free From Nuclear Weapons’ was created by SGI as the first project to launch this campaign.

It examined the nuclear threat from the perspective of human security. The exhibition, after touring more than 230 cities in 31 countries and territories around the world, completed its successful showing in Bahrain in March 2013 in the presence of Bahrain’s Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Everything You Treasure – For a World Free From Nuclear Weapons today builds on those experiences. “The exhibition, realized with the invaluable support of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), aims to foster a deep awareness of the consequences of nuclear weapons by re-examining the challenges they pose from twelve different perspectives, including ecological integrity, human rights and gender,” said Hirotsugu Terasaki, Vice President of Soka Gakkai and Executive Director, SGI Peace Affairs:

The English-language version of the exhibition was first launched at the 20th World Congress of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) in Hiroshima in 2012. It has since been shown at ICAN's Civil Society Forum in Oslo, Norway, in March 2013, and later at the UN Office at Geneva, during the Second Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in April 2013.

As Ikeda stressed, the organizers of the exhibition feel "acutely the importance of sharing with the world the message of the hibakusha (survivors of atom bombs) and all the citizens of Hiroshima – that the catastrophic tragedy of nuclear bombing must never be repeated and that humankind cannot coexist with nuclear weapons."

"In today's world, beset by the growing threat of nuclear proliferation, the spirit of Hiroshima represents a fundamental and universal principle to which all people, of all backgrounds and nationalities, must return if we are to make peace a reality," the SGI president added.

A tipping point

Whether the imaginary press release is realized in August 2015 or not, recent developments suggest that the nuclear debate is approaching a tipping point. The discourse is finally reframing the issue of nuclear weapons from the Cold War focus on state security through deterrence to efforts for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament based on a frank recognition of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.

A landmark is May 2012, when 16 countries, led by Norway and Switzerland, issued a joint statement on the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament, stressing: "All states must intensify their efforts to outlaw nuclear weapons and achieve a world free of nuclear weapons." There have since been more than one similar joint statements and the most recent, the Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, has been signed by 80 governments.

Statements made by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement gave a significant impetus to shifting the discussion and highlighting the need to reframe the nuclear weapons debate in humanitarian terms. Also the High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on Nuclear Disarmament on September 26, 2013 has underscored the need for a nuclear weapons free world.

"Given the intensifying interrogation of the continued existence of nuclear weapons on humanitarian grounds, it is vital that both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states effect a decisive shift in policy," argues Ikeda. "This is necessary if we are to move forward toward the outlawing and

abolition of nuclear weapons. And to grow momentum toward this end we must expand the solidarity of people around the world who share the determination of Hiroshima's citizens that their tragic experience must never be visited upon anyone else," the SGI president adds.

Against this backdrop, it was particularly significant that the inspiring 2013 Hiroshima Peace Declaration described the atomic bomb as "the ultimate inhumane weapon and an absolute evil". It added: "The hibakusha, who know the hell of an atomic bombing, have continuously fought that evil. To that end, the city of Hiroshima and the more than 5,700 cities that comprise Mayors for Peace, in collaboration with the UN and like-minded NGOs, seek to abolish nuclear weapons by 2020 and throw our full weight behind the early achievement of a nuclear weapons convention," said Matsui Kazumi, Mayor of the City of Hiroshima at the memorable exhibition.

In a clarion call the Mayor added: "Policymakers of the world, how long will you remain imprisoned by distrust and animosity? Do you honestly believe you can continue to maintain national security by rattling your sabres? Please come to Hiroshima. Encounter the spirit of the hibakusha. Look squarely at the future of the human family without being trapped in the past, and make the decision to shift to a security based on trust and dialogue."

The exhibition indeed re-examines the threat nuclear weapons pose to today's world from multiple perspectives: ecological integrity, economic security, human rights, gender and the social responsibility of science. SGI and ICAN hope that the exhibition will help foster and expand solidarity for the elimination of nuclear weapons "based on a consciousness that nuclear weapons are something deeply and personally relevant to each of our lives".

As the SGI President argues, "To build a world free of nuclear weapons requires more than removing existing nuclear threats. It is the challenge to empower citizens to take the initiative in creating an era of peaceful coexistence – realizing a sustainable global society in which all people, including the members of future generations, can fully experience the dignity of their own lives and the lives of others."

In this context, Hiroshima Governor Hidehiko Yuzaki rightly pointed out at the exhibition: "Hiroshima is promoting a message of peace throughout the world. At the same time, we are currently working to build a mechanism that will sustain and support peace-building efforts around the world. We wish to cooperate with like-minded organizations in Japan and abroad to consolidate efforts toward this goal and make Hiroshima become the hub for promoting global peace." [IDN-InDepthNews – October 7, 2013] □

"Policymakers of the world, how long will you remain imprisoned by distrust and animosity? Do you honestly believe you can continue to maintain national security by rattling your sabres? Please come to Hiroshima. Encounter the spirit of the hibakusha. Look squarely at the future of the human family without being trapped in the past, and make the decision to shift to a security based on trust and dialogue."

DISARMAMENT

UN Presses Forward on Global Ban on Nuke Tests

By Jaya Ramachandran



Some of the members of the Group of Eminent Persons at the official launching of the group in New York on September 26, 2013. Credit: CTBTO

NEW YORK – Seventeen years after the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) opened for signature, the United Nations has launched a new initiative to expedite its entry into force “at the earliest possible date”.

Foreign ministers and high-level representatives from the 183 Member States of the Treaty have urged the eight remaining States – China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and the United States – to sign and ratify the CTBT, “thus ridding the world once and for all of nuclear test explosions”. Ratification by these eight countries is indispensable for the Treaty coming into force.

The Final Declaration of the Conference on Facilitating Entry into Force of the CTBT adopted unanimously on September 27, 2013 at the United Nations headquarters in New York affirms “the importance and urgency of achieving early entry into force of the Treaty as a crucial practical step for systematic and progressive efforts towards nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.”

The declaration also describes the universal condemnation of the North Korea’s announced nuclear tests as “a testament to the normative strength of the Treaty and its contribution to the stigmatization of nuclear test explosions”.

The declaration argues that the cessation of all nuclear weapon test explosions and all other nuclear explosions, by constraining the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons and ending the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons, constitute an effective measure of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation

in all its aspects. “The ending of nuclear weapon testing is, thus, a meaningful step in the realization of the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons globally, and of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control,” the declaration states.

The declaration states that the UN Security Council Summit on nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament in New York on September 24, 2009, which adopted resolution 1887, and the adoption by consensus of the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), among other events, demonstrate continued strong international will to see this Treaty brought into force.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who opened the conference, urged all remaining States to sign and ratify the CTBT without further delay. “This is a call I make on behalf of all people in our world who adamantly oppose the development of those indiscriminate weapons and yearn for a safer world,” Ban said.

“History teaches that we have to be diligent in pressing for ratification,” he added, pointing out that the 1919 Convention for the Control of the Trade in Arms and Ammunition never entered into force. Neither did the 1925 Convention for the Supervision of the International Trade in Arms and Ammunition and in Implements of War.

“After these setbacks, it took 88 years for governments to adopt another multilateral treaty to control conventional arms transfers, the Arms Trade Treaty. The international community cannot afford anything near this long wait to revive efforts to outlaw nuclear testing if the CTBT fails to enter into force,” Ban emphasized. “The repeated nuclear tests by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea should serve as a wake-up call that now is the time to act,” he added.

A uniting force

Lassina Zerbo, the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), said the UN General Assembly’s High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament on September 26 “marked the resolve of the international community to breathe new life into the multilateral nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.”

He added: “The CTBT is a uniting force in the multilateral system. Today, the prospects for entry into force of the Treaty appear much more positive than they did for many years. It shall be up to you to seize the moment and to determine the action necessary to realize the dream.”

János Martonyi and Marty Natalegawa, the Foreign Ministers of Hungary and Indonesia, jointly chaired the biennial meeting, commonly referred to as the “Article XIV conference.” In his opening remarks, Martonyi said particular effort should be placed on dialogue with the eight remaining countries yet to ratify. “We will therefore spare no efforts to convince these countries that embracing the CTBT can only enhance their own security and standing.”

Hungary was one of the first to ratify the CTBTO. Former CTBTO Executive Secretary Tibor Tóth, who headed the organization for eight-years until Zerbo – who hails from Burkina Faso – took over in August 2013.

Referring to his country’s ratification of the CTBT on February 6, 2012, Natalegawa said: “Indonesia decided to ratify the Treaty last year to create new momentum that would encourage the remaining Annex 2 countries to also ratify it. We also wanted to demonstrate our firm commitment to

nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.” He added: “The continuing moratorium on nuclear test explosions is important but this is only a temporary measure. It does not ensure the permanent cessation of nuclear weapon test explosions.”



CTBTO Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo

The recent ratifications by Guinea-Bissau on September 24, 2013 and Iraq on September 26, 2013 which increased the total number of ratifications to 161 were welcomed by States attending the conference.

The conference agreed on eleven concrete measures to accelerate the CTBT’s entry into force. These include support for bilateral, regional and multilateral outreach initiatives and cooperation with civil society as well as encouraging a range of other activities designed to increase the number of signatures and ratifications by raising awareness about the importance of the Treaty.

Group of Eminent Persons

The Final Declaration also welcomes the establishment of the Group of Eminent Persons (GEM) on September 26, 2013 to promote the objectives of the Treaty and help secure its entry into force.

“The Group will inject new energy and dynamics into the entry into force process,” the CTBTO Executive Secretary said. “As I look to this Group, I am inspired by the sheer magnitude of their experience and expertise. Through their credibility, credentials and experience, I expect the Group to open new paths for the entry into force of the Treaty,” Zerbo said.

States commended the effectiveness of the CTBT verification regime as demonstrated on many occasions, most recently in response to the North Korea’s nuclear test announced on February 12, 2013.

The CTBT bans all nuclear explosions everywhere, by everyone. The CTBTO is building an International Monitoring System (IMS) to make sure that no nuclear explosion goes undetected. Over 85% of this network has already been established. CTBTO monitoring data also have non-verification uses and can be used for disaster mitigation such as earthquake monitoring, tsunami warning, and the tracking of radioactivity from nuclear accidents.

[IDN-InDepthNews – September 30, 2013] □

DISARMAMENT

ICAN Australia Shows The Way To Abolish Nukes

By Neena Bhandari

SYDNEY - Even as the nuclear-armed countries continue to amass new warheads and build and modernise ballistic missiles, bombers and submarines to launch them, the campaign for nuclear abolition is growing from strength to strength.

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons' (ICAN) Paper Cranes Project – symbolizing support for nuclear disarmament – is urging governments to begin negotiations on a global treaty banning nuclear weapons this year. More than 190,000 paper cranes have already been delivered to world leaders, and messages of support have been received from the Secretary-General of the United Nations and amongst others national leaders of Australia, Afghanistan, Greece, Kazakhstan, the Marshall Islands, Mozambique, Slovenia and Switzerland.

“Our focus now is on getting responses from the presidents and prime ministers of other countries. This month around 70,000 paper cranes will be delivered to ambassadors in Tokyo, asking them to pass on the cranes to their leader. We will use the letters to demonstrate the strength and breadth of support globally for a ban on nuclear weapons,” ICAN Australia Director, Tim Wright, told IDN.

Students across the world are participating in the campaign. Earlier this year, students from Gisborne Secondary College in Victoria (Australia) made 1000 paper cranes and delivered them to the parliamentary secretary to Australian prime minister, calling for ban on nuclear weapons.

The school’s Japanese language teacher, Noriko Ikaga, has been taking Years 10 and 11 students to Japan every alternate year. “It has become a tradition to make 1000 paper cranes when we visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. This year, the students also folded another 6000 paper cranes for the kids affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster,” Ikaga told IDN.

With Australia going to polls on September 7, these students are hoping that future leaders will take Australia’s nuclear obligations seriously. ICAN’s Global Parliamentary Appeal is calling on all national governments to negotiate a treaty banning nuclear weapons and building political will for stringent action to bring global nuclear weapons stockpiles down from about 17,000 to zero.

“In Australia we are virtually ignorant to the risks that we, as a population, are under every day, due to the enormous amounts of nuclear weapons that still exist in the world. Our trip to Hiroshima made us determined to do something



about it. We sought to show the Australian Prime Minister how much we cared, and that Disarmament was an issue that could not be ignored,” Holly Dwyer (17), a Year 11 student, told IDN.

Holly’s classmate, Joel Mackinnon (17), was surprised how little most students in her class knew about the nuclear weapons industry. “It

genuinely scares me that we hold the fate of the world and humanity in the hands of such governments which appear to be almost willing to go to war. Participating in the Paper Cranes project is a start to saving the world from the unacceptable global threat posed by nuclear weapons,” Mackinnon told IDN.

An ICAN Australia’s Disarm Your Degree report, which examined Australian public university investments in nuclear arms makers, confirmed that four universities did invest in nuclear weapons producers and 12 did not. The information available for the remaining 17 universities was insufficient.

“Many university students have shown a strong interest in this campaign, and are working with us to raise awareness. The University of Sydney has indicated that it is in the process of adopting an ethical investment policy. None of the other universities have indicated that they intend to change their investment practices, but we will maintain the pressure,” Wright told IDN.

The Future Fund

ICAN is calling on universities to develop ethical investment policies that exclude nuclear weapons companies both from their direct investments and their investments through fund managers. An Australian Government investment fund, The Future Fund, currently invests A\$227 million in nuclear weapons companies.

A petition with 14,000 signatures was delivered in August 2013 to the Fund’s board members and ICAN members visited the Fund’s head office in Melbourne on Hiroshima Day (August 6) and Nagasaki Day (August 9), demanding that it divests from nuclear weapons companies.

Photo: ICAN director Tim Wright and Hiroshima students launch thousand paper cranes project
Credit: MAPWcommunications

Wright said, "The Fund has divested from companies involved in the production of other inhumane weapons such as cluster munitions and landmines. They recently excluded tobacco companies from their investments in response to public pressure, so we are optimistic that we can also convince them to exclude nuclear weapons companies."

Earlier, the Fund had disclosed to the Senate (one of the two houses of Australian Parliament) that it invests taxpayers' money in 14 companies involved in the production and maintenance of nuclear weapons or associated technology.

"I think a lot of Australians would be shocked to learn that the Future Fund has more than A\$130 million invested in companies that manufacture nuclear arms. Our members regularly express concern about the investment choices made by those overseeing the Future Fund," said Rohan Wenn, Communications Manager at [GetUp Australia](#), an independent, grassroots community advocacy organisation.

As many as 76 per cent of Australians believe that nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament should be a top foreign policy objective of the Australian Government, according to a 2011 survey conducted by the Lowy Institute for International Policy, an independent think tank.

Australian governments have been strong proponents of nuclear non-proliferation. Australia is a party to all major international conventions relating to nuclear weapons including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ([NPT](#)), the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty ([CTBT](#)), and the [South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty commonly known as The Treaty of Rarotonga](#) as it was signed by the South Pacific nations on the island of Rarotonga (Cook Islands).

"It's easy to imagine that Australia is not involved in the global nuclear weapons trade, but with the Future Fund's investments in nuclear weapons companies and the Federal Governments intentions to export uranium to India and other nuclear weapons states, it most certainly is," ICAN Australia's Outreach Coordinator, Gem Romuld, told IDN.

The Treaty of Rarotonga prohibits Australia from facilitating the manufacture of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world. According to ICAN, the Future Fund might be contravening Australian legislation that outlaws assistance to anyone involved in the "manufacture, production, acquisition or testing" of nuclear devices inside and outside Australia.

Doctrine of extended nuclear deterrence

While Australia doesn't have any nuclear weapons, it subscribes to the doctrine of extended nuclear deterrence under the United States alliance. The supposed protection afforded by the US nuclear weapons is seen as key to Australia's national security. It also has almost 40 per cent of the world's known uranium reserves and supplies 19 per cent of the world market.

All of Australia's uranium is exported, including to countries who continue to produce nuclear weapons. The [Australian Conservation Fund](#) has consistently opposed uranium mining and worked to highlight the threats it poses to the environment, sensitive ecosystems, Indigenous cultures and local communities.

In May this year, ICAN Australia launched a booklet entitled [Disarmament Double-Speak](#) assessing Australia's record on nuclear weapons, its continuing support for the United States extended nuclear deterrence, its resistance to a global ban on nuclear weapons, the inadequacy of safeguards on uranium exports and investments in nuclear arms companies.

Today, there are at least 20,000 nuclear weapons worldwide, around 3,000 of them on launch-ready alert. The potential power of these would roughly equate to 150,000 Hiroshima bombs. Sixty-eight years on since the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the need to develop a legally binding tool to prohibit and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons is more than ever before.

[IDN-InDepthNews – August 27, 2013] □



The Last Post is played at an Anzac Day ceremony in Port Melbourne, Victoria. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

DISARMAMENT

North Korea and a Nuclear Weapons Ban

By Frederick N. Mattis*

Author of Banning Weapons of Mass Destruction, pub. ABC-Clio/Praeger Security International.

ANNAPOLIS, USA - To abolish nuclear weapons, North Korea and all states would have to join the ban before its entry into force, for three reasons. First, the nuclear ban (or abolition) treaty, often called a Nuclear Weapons Convention, would not create true abolition unless all states are parties to it. Second, current nuclear powers in all likelihood would not join unless the ban when enacted is truly global. (There already exists the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which has been joined by all but nine states as “non-nuclear weapon” parties.) Third, unanimity of accession by states would give the ban unprecedented geopolitical force for ongoing compliance by states - desirable in itself, and a crucial incentive for today’s nuclear weapon possessors to actually renounce their arsenals.

An enacted nuclear ban treaty would bring the following benefits to all states and people: freedom from the threat of nuclear war or attack, freedom from possible “false-alarm” nuclear missile launch, and freedom from possible terrorist acquisition of a weapon from a state’s nuclear arsenal.

As with all nuclear possessors, North Korea claims that its weapons are for “deterrence.” But the presence of North Korea’s nuclear weapons could actually work to cause demise of the North Korean regime. If the USA, in a moment of crisis, launches a pre-emptive (preventive) – strike even with just conventional weapons against North Korea’s nuclear weapons or sites, then a North Korean military response likely would become a full-scale new and terrible Korean War. North Korea can be bellicose, but it is reasonable to believe that North Korea does not want to engage in full-scale war against South Korea and the USA. (The USA, for its part, has proclaimed that it has “no intention” of attacking North Korea.)

The “Agreed Framework”

North Korea to its credit in 1994 even agreed, without a [prospective] worldwide nuclear ban, to freeze its plutonium-based nuclear weapons development program, and in return was to be provided fuel oil supplies by the USA, plus there was arrangement of construction subsidy for two safeguarded (internationally monitored) light-water nuclear power reactors for North Korean electricity production. Why did this plutonium-centered pact – 1994 “Agreed Framework” – fall apart eight years later in late 2002, which was followed in 2006 by North Korea’s first nuclear test explosion? Because the USA, aggravated when it discerned evidence of undeclared North Korean work or research on uranium enrichment – usable for nuclear weapons or for other, peaceful purposes – cut off in fall 2002 the fuel oil supplies that were an integral part of the Agreed Framework. North Korea regarded this as abrogation of the Framework, and



expelled International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors and restarted plutonium nuclear weapons work.

It is conceivable, though, that North Korea would have refused to sign the 1994 Agreed Framework if uranium enrichment research or work was prohibited, and if so inevitably on familiar grounds that enriched uranium has its domestic, non-weapons uses (such as electricity production from power reactors, which generally use low-enriched uranium which is not suitable for weapons). But to those who say that the collapse of the Framework

in 2002 shows extreme perfidy on North Korea’s part and that North Korea would never (reliably) maintain a denuclearization agreement, let this serve as a reminder that it was the USA, not North Korea, that first abrogated a major part of the Framework by cutting off oil supplies, and North Korea reacted by declaring the Framework null and void - and resumed plutonium-based weapons work, culminating in first test explosion on 9 October 2006.

2005 Joint Statement of Principles

Between the 2002 demise of the plutonium-centered Framework and that first nuclear test in 2006, a seeming breakthrough occurred with the Sept. 2005 denuclearization agreement called “Six-Party Joint Statement of Principles.” But this soon hit rough seas, particularly on the Statement’s obligation of parties to “discuss at an appropriate time the subject of provision of a light-water [power] reactor to [North Korea].” When North Korea averred that elimination of its entire nuclear weapons program would have to be preceded by provision of the power reactor (a huge construction project), recriminations ensued. But North Korea’s blustery assertiveness on this point was somewhat justified, considering the multi-year delay, under the fallen 1994 Agreed Framework, in merely commencing the Framework’s stipulated power reactor construction project:

first concrete for footings was poured in early fall 2002 (shortly before the Framework's de facto demise), whereas initial target completion date for first of two promised reactors was 2003. North Korea and the other parties to the talks, not North Korea alone, deserve retrospective blame for not clarifying in the 2005 Statement of Principles the issue of reactor construction in regards to its time-relation to actual North Korean nuclear disarmament.



With each side accusing the other of abrogating or disregarding the letter or the spirit of the 2005 Statement of Principles, the stage was set for North Korea's aforementioned first (2006) nuclear test explosion. North Korea then returned to negotiations, and in December 2006, North Korea and the others of the six-party talks agreed to reaffirm the 2005 Statement of Principles. North Korea kept its word on this and proceeded to laboriously shut down its source of new weapons plutonium (Yongbyon reactor), and in return for fuel oil from South Korea, weapons inspectors were readmitted into North Korea – and were given access they needed to confirm North Korea's shutdown of the reactor and later demolition of its cooling tower.

So as of 2007, the North Korean plutonium nuclear weapons program was again stemmed from further growth (as it was for eight years with the 1994 Agreed Framework), although the issue of uranium enrichment – which in some aspects is a more difficult path to a nuclear arsenal than plutonium separation – was still unsettled. This relatively much better state of affairs ended in the wake of North Korea's attempted launch of a satellite on 5 April 2009. The USA and others mightily condemned the launch, because it could have missile-applicability and was seen as severely provocative, whereupon North Korea expelled international inspectors and proclaimed that it was restarting its weapons program, and then conducted its second nuclear test on 25 May 2009.

Before casting all blame and obloquy on North Korea for the demise (although it may be revived in some form) of the denuclearization 2005 Statement of Principles (and subsequent 2007 understandings): the Statement and follow-up discussions did not specifically prohibit North Korean satellite launches, and therefore the launch did not directly or unequivocally violate that “reigning,” 2005 agreement. For its part, though, North Korea has by no means obeyed the pany of U.N. Security Council Resolutions on its nuclear and missile programs; obviously the “sovereign state” of North Korea does not feel bound by such - which has also been the case for various other countries from time to time.

Short-lived 2012 Agreement

On 29 February 2012, North Korea in a seeming new breakthrough agreed to suspend uranium enrichment activity and institute moratoriums on nuclear and long-range missile tests in exchange for 240,000 metric tons of food aid. Just six

weeks later, though (13 April), North Korea attempted to launch another satellite. The effort failed, but its occurrence destroyed the agreement – just as U.S. and others' reaction to North Korean satellite launch attempt of April 2009 had ended North Korean compliance with the 2005 Statement of Principles.

On 12 December 2012 North Korea proceeded with another satellite launch, this one successful. As with the 2009 and April 2012

efforts, because the rocket technology for satellite-launch could be missile-applicable, the USA and others denounced the action and pressed for further international sanctions against North Korea. The angered North Korea then conducted its third nuclear test, on 12 February 2013. But North Korea had never agreed to abstain from space-launches; in any case, one lesson from the roiling waters of nuclear negotiations with North Korea is to not expect anything of North Korea which is not explicitly called for in an agreement.

North Korea and a Nuclear Weapons Ban

Looking forward to a possible nuclear weapons-free world, it bears emphasis that North Korea twice verifiably froze its nuclear weapons (plutonium) program, for eight years with the 1994 Agreed Framework and then with the 2007 shutdown of plutonium-producing reactor and related steps pursuant to 2005 Statement of Principles. Also, although very short-lived, North Korea as just noted agreed (29 February 2012) to halt uranium enrichment and nuclear and long-range missile tests - until food aid promised to North Korea was rescinded when it conducted (failed) satellite launch in April. These actions by North Korea to freeze and in some cases even reverse elements of its nuclear weapons program (such as shutdown of Yongbyon reactor) were undertaken by North Korea despite the absence of a [prospective] worldwide nuclear weapons ban – and surely such a ban, when open for states' signatures, would amplify the prospects that North Korea would join the ban and join the world in eliminating nuclear weapons.

It is possible, perhaps, that North Korea will (again) freeze important elements of its nuclear program or even eliminate its nuclear weapons, without a worldwide nuclear ban. But presumably this would require a major change in the U.S. stance toward North Korea – including one or more manifestations such as normalization of diplomatic relations, perhaps an official “peace treaty” or non-aggression pact (although the USA, as mentioned has stated that it has no intention of attacking North Korea), elimination of special U.S.-South Korean military exercises, provision of food aid and power reactor, etc. Given such prospective requests or demands, nuclear disarmament by North Korea is much more likely to occur in the context of worldwide abolition – which context, to the benefit of the USA and others, would hold much less justification for North Korea (even in its own eyes) to issue extreme “demands” or requirements before it would join. In addition: fealty to elimination of nuclear

weapons by North Korea (or any state) would, for geopolitical and psychological reasons, obviously be much stronger with a nuclear ban treaty that regards states equally and that all states have joined.

Incentives to Join

Following are security and other advantages that would accrue to North Korea if it joined a nuclear weapons ban (along with all other states before entry into force):

First, under worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons, North Korea would no longer be subject to possible nuclear war – such as escalation of a border conflict with South Korea and its currently nuclear-armed U.S. ally.

Second, as mentioned earlier, North Korea would not be subject to (or “forced into”) all-out war (nuclear or otherwise) by possible U.S./South Korean pre-emptive attack during a crisis against North Korean nuclear weapons, missiles, or facilities.

Third, North Korea would be praised worldwide – for playing a crucial role in bringing the worldwide nuclear ban to reality.

Fourth, states would be inclined to engage in some or additional beneficial action such as trade with North Korea.

Fifth, on an inner moral level North Korean leaders and the people would feel deserved satisfaction that they had crucially aided worldwide liquidation of nuclear weapons – which persons everywhere know have an abhorrent and inhuman aspect, with their quadruple means of dealing mass death (blast, heat, radiation, firestorm).

Sixth, on the “psychological” level of nuclear weaponry and fairness, the USA and North Korea would be equal (with no states having nuclear weapons under the ban).

If, right now, a nuclear ban was introduced for states’ signatures, North Korea probably would decline to be an immediate signatory - or only with likely-unacceptable (extreme and sudden) conditions. But the above-noted security, prosperity, and psychological benefits to North Korea of worldwide nuclear abolition in all likelihood would, as more and more states join the ban and it approaches unanimity needed for entry into force, become evident to North Korea – which would not (as today) be “singled out” for nuclear abolition while other countries maintain their arsenals. [IDN-InDepthNews – July 19, 2013] □



View of Pyongyang | Wikimedia Commons

DISARMAMENT

Obama Magic is Gone – Caution Outweighs Zeal

By Ramesh Jaura



President Barack Obama delivers remarks at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany, June 19, 2013.
(Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

BERLIN - President Barack Obama's commitment four years ago "to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons" reverberated across the globe generating hope that humankind will not be annihilated by a sheer flash of light. On June 19 in Berlin he sought to build on the iconic Prague speech. But there was no magic filling the air.

The reason, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) General Secretary Kate Hudson wrote on June 28 in her blog: "... despite Obama's apparent continued commitment to the goal of global abolition, he did not quite take us to the dizzy heights of hope and emotion stirred by his Prague speech in 2009."

Much of what Obama spoke of in Berlin was on the Prague list too, but progress has been slow, said Hudson. "Ratifying the CTBT (Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty) and moving forward on a fissile material treaty were both there in Prague and are still there now, as are the questions of nuclear security and access to civil nuclear power. Looking back, it is clear that the ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty – START – was the only real achievement out of Obama's 2009 initiative, with some success in reducing their respective nuclear stockpiles."

Hudson added: "... maybe that is because since then we have seen that whatever his intentions, he has been unable to deliver on his disarmament promises without at the same time pledging modernisation of nuclear weaponry and pursuing new systems which void the 'deterrent' effect of his potential opponents' nuclear weapons."

She pointed out that Obama was not having an easy time of it at home either. "Since Berlin, a number of Republican senators have jumped up to denounce the president in no uncertain terms with Kelly Ayotte describing his intentions as misguided and dangerous. So there are many obstacles to further progress on nuclear disarmament, to put it mildly. Although the picture would not be complete without recognising the impact of the financial crisis on public opinion and changing perceptions of security needs.

"Whether in the US or the United Kingdom, there is increasing hostility to spending on nuclear weapons. They are widely perceived as wasteful and anachronistic. People feel they are failing to meet 21st century threats such as terrorism, cyber warfare or climate change."

While welcoming President Obama's announcement in Berlin calling for a world without nuclear weapons and the readiness to pursue further reductions in the US and Russian nuclear arsenals, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) said: "... the humanitarian consequences of any nuclear weapon use, increasingly the focus of global engagement on these weapons, demands their prohibition and elimination."

ICAN added: "The speech by President Obama contributes to a growing recognition that nuclear weapons are unusable weapons with no practical utility in today's global security environment. Despite this, they threaten shocking humanitarian consequences if they were to be used. Nuclear weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction not subject to treaty prohibition and ICAN is calling for such a treaty to provide the framework for their elimination."

Speaking from the former East German side of the historic Brandenburg Gate in divided Germany, Obama declared: "We may no longer live in fear of global annihilation, but so long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe." In this context, it was significant that Obama linked nuclear weapons to peace and justice: "Peace with justice means pursuing the security of a world without nuclear weapons – no matter how distant that dream may be."

"While this goal may seem to be a distant or even unrealistic one to some, it is not beyond our reach," said Soka Gakkai (SG) Vice President Hirotsugu Terasaki – who is also Executive Director, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Peace Affairs. He quoted SGI President Daisaku Ikeda: "In order to achieve real security in the twenty-first century we need to bring forth the powers of imagination that will enable us to directly and accurately apprehend evolving realities, to guide these changes toward the desired direction and to give birth to entirely new realities."

The Tokyo-based lay Buddhist organisation with members around the world, has been in the forefront of promoting awareness of the need to abolish nuclear weapons.

"President Obama's Berlin speech is a welcome reaffirmation of his commitment to achieving a world free from nuclear weapons. The readiness he expresses to pursue further reductions in the US and Russian nuclear arsenals represents a concrete step toward this goal," Terasaki said in a statement forwarded to IDN.

He added: "To make good on its stated commitments, the US administration now needs to establish a path of tangible actions to move beyond a world of decreased nuclear risks to reach the goal of nuclear weapons abolition. As President Obama's stance makes clear, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence can no longer make any meaningful contribution to the security of any state. This is something the world's ordinary citizens have long known: holding humanity hostage to nuclear Armageddon makes no one safe."

In view of the risks, effects and costs of nuclear weapons, Terasaki said, there is both the practical necessity and the moral imperative to rid the world of those apocalyptic weapons. "The time has come to initiate negotiations on a treaty that will prohibit nuclear weapons," he added.

"The work for eliminating nuclear weapons must be a global enterprise, shared by all members of the human family," Terasaki stressed. "Every actor – the nuclear weapons states, the states that have refrained from developing these weapons and, most critically, the world's people – must play

a role. The SGI is committed to building grassroots awareness in order to empower people's efforts toward the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons."

More work to do

Obama admitted in his Berlin speech that "we have more work to do", and said he was "announcing additional steps forward". He went on to say: "After a comprehensive review, I've determined that we can ensure the security of America and our allies, and maintain a strong and credible strategic deterrent, while reducing our deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third. And I intend to seek negotiated cuts with Russia to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures."

"At the same time," he said, "we'll work with our NATO allies to seek bold reductions in US and Russian tactical weapons in Europe. And we can forge a new international framework for peaceful nuclear power, and reject the nuclear weaponization that North Korea and Iran may be seeking."

Obama added: "America will host a summit in 2016 to continue our efforts to secure nuclear materials around the world, and we will work to build support in the United States to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and call on all nations to begin negotiations on a treaty that ends the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons. These are steps we can take to create a world of peace with justice."

Although the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which bans all nuclear explosions, has been signed by 183 countries of which 158 have also now ratified, it can only enter into force after it has been ratified by the eight remaining nuclear capable countries: China, the North Korea, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and the United States.

Towards Global Zero

Expectedly, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle's response on June 19 underlined cautious optimism mixed with an oblique reference to Berlin's interest in having U.S. tactical weapons removed from the German soil and a genuine dialogue with Russia: "President Obama's proposals on nuclear disarmament are a bold step forward which Germany supports in its foreign policy."

"The world will become a safer and better place if we together manage to realize his plans for nuclear disarmament. Fewer nuclear weapons and effective global rules on nuclear non-proliferation are decisive steps towards Global Zero – a world without nuclear weapons."

Now we need to work together to use the momentum. This is especially true of dialogue with Moscow. A reduction also in tactical nuclear weapons in Europe is particularly important to us. The German government will do its utmost to support President Obama's plans."

On June 20, Westerwelle explained in a statement at a conference on security in Nuremberg: "There are still 17,000

nuclear warheads around the world. If this figure can be reduced, the world will be a safer place. That's why President Obama's disarmament initiative is a bold step forward for peace and security.

"That President Obama has expressly included tactical nuclear weapons in Europe in his proposals, will give a boost to our efforts to bring about the withdrawal of the last nuclear weapons remaining on German soil.

"President Obama's initiative is a great vindication of our decision to make nuclear disarmament a priority in Germany's foreign policy. Of course, the other nuclear powers, especially Russia, have to play their part. We will now step up the dialogue with Moscow with a view to supporting President Obama's initiative. The focus of German foreign policy will be on building bridges to foster nuclear disarmament.

"A world without nuclear weapons is a vision, not an illusion. Of course, it will not come about overnight. We need political will, astute diplomacy and, above all, perseverance and strategic patience."

Chance passed

Uta Zapf, Chair of the German parliamentary sub-committee on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation said on June 27 that Russia will not accept President Obama's proposal for further reduction in nuclear weapons as long as no heed is paid to the country's security needs.

She added: "Why should U.S. tactical nuclear weapons continue to stay in Europe and with us until disarmament has taken place? Would it not be much more conducive to disarmament if these weapons were stationed in the U.S.?"

In fact, the chance for a withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons seems to have passed, Zapf said. "The June 12, 2013 new 'Nuclear Employment Strategy' of the United States – probably as a consequence of the decisions of Chicago (NATO summit) – stipulates the deployment of these weapons in Europe. The modernization of the B61 would appear to be an integral component of the U.S. strategy to protect allies ('extended deterrence')."

Russian reaction showed that Zapf is not off the mark. As the New START accord already requires each nation by 2018 to cap its stockpile of fielded warheads at 1,550, under Obama's proposal a new ceiling could become roughly 1,000 deployed strategic warheads apiece, according to the Global Security Newswire.

"Russia objects to the Obama administration's plan through the next five years to field increasingly capable missile interceptors in Europe. The Kremlin has not accepted the White House insistence that the antimissile systems are solely aimed at protecting against possible Iranian missile attacks, and is demanding a legally binding accord that

would govern the interceptors' usage. Numerous rounds of US-Russia talks on missile defense have been unable to resolve the core differences," noted the Global Security Newswire.

Considering that the antimissile issue is not yet resolved, Moscow is taking Obama's concept for talks with a grain of salt, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin was reported by ITAR-Tass to have said on June 20.

"How can we possibly take this thesis about cutting the strategic nuclear potentials seriously, when the USA is building up the potential to intercept this strategic potential? Obviously, the top political leadership cannot take these assurances seriously," Rogozin said to journalists.

Moscow is unable to "indefinitely and bilaterally talk with the United States about cuts and restrictions on nuclear weapons in a situation where a whole number of other countries are expanding their nuclear and missile potentials," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said to RIA Novosti. "Before discussing the necessity of a further reduction of nuclear weapons we need to arrive at an acceptable solution of the (missile defence) problem."

Cold war posture

In an analysis for the Global Security Newswire, Elaine M. Grossman wrote on June 21: "While President Obama made headlines . . . for proposing to negotiate with Russia fresh reductions in each side's fielded nuclear arms, the US leader has more quietly directed the Defense Department to hang onto some notable mainstays of the Cold War.

"A few hours after Obama's speech in Berlin, the Pentagon released publicly a report to Congress on guidance the president issued in recent days on 'nuclear employment strategy' (to which Uta Zapf also referred) – the broad targeting directives that help determine how many atomic arms the nation requires."

"On the one hand, the guidance directs pursuit of additional reductions in deployed strategic warheads and less reliance on preparing for a surprise nuclear attack," Grossman quoted nuclear weapons expert Hans Kristensen saying in a June 20 blog post. "On the other hand, the guidance reaffirms a commitment to core Cold War posture characteristics such as counterforce targeting, retaining a triad of strategic nuclear forces, and retaining non-strategic nuclear weapons forward-deployed in Europe."

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DISARMAMENT

What About The 'Global Red Line' For Nukes

By Ramesh Jaura

BERLIN - Reputed to be an ardent campaigner for a nuclear weapons free world, ICAN has yet again called upon the powers-that-be to ban all nukes threatening the very survival of planet Earth and entire humankind. The fervent appeal by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons coincided with the UN high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament in New York.

In a statement on September 26, ICAN, a global campaign coalition of more than 300 organizations in 80 countries, asks: "Where Is the 'Global Red Line' for Nuclear Weapons?"

The question alludes to U.S. President Barack Obama's reference to the 'red line' having been crossed in Syria, in the wake of alleged use of chemical weapons, and threatening military action, which has been averted by Russia jumping in to build a bridge to President Bashar Hafez al-Assad.

"The horrors of the attack in Syria have shown the danger inherent in the continued possession of weapons of mass destruction. The global outrage in response to the carnage caused by the use of chemical weapons is proof that until they are eradicated, there is a significant risk that one day they will be used, whether by intention or by accident. Nuclear weapons, for all their status and symbolism, are not exempt from this stark reality, and the cost of neglecting to recognize this would be disastrous," the ICAN warns.

Eight 'confirmed signatories' of the statement, besides Liv Tørres, General Secretary of the Norwegian People's Aid, who posted it on The Huffington Post, are: Madeleine Rees, Secretary General, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF); Philip Jennings, General Secretary, UNI Global Union; Jan Gruiters, Executive Director, IKV Pax Christi; Kate Hudson, General Secretary, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND); Akira Kawasaki, Member of the Executive Committee, Peace Boat; Michael Christ, Executive Director, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW); and Hirotsugu Terasaki, Executive Director, Soka Gakkai International (SGI).

SGI – a lay Buddhist movement linking more than 12 million people around the world – has a pride of place among faith-based organisations. It has been campaigning relentlessly for abolition of nuclear weapons since the second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda's Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons issued on September 8, 1957. In 2007, SGI launched the People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition campaign in order to galvanize public opinion in favour of banning all nuclear arsenal.



In fact SGI president Daisaku Ikeda put forward in his annual Peace Proposal 2010 the idea of organising a nuclear abolition summit in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2015 to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of those cities. He reiterated the proposal in 2011 and the following year, and suggested the possibility of even organising the 2015 NPT Review Conference in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In Peace Proposal 2013, Ikeda went a step further and pleaded for an expanded summit for a nuclear-weapon-free world: "The G8 Summit in 2015, the seventieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, would be an appropriate opportunity for such a summit, which should include the additional participation of representatives of the United Nations and non-G8 states in possession of nuclear weapons, as well as members of the five existing NWFZs (nuclear weapons free zones) and those states which have taken a lead in calling for nuclear abolition."

Global humanitarian threat

The statement carried by The Huffington Post stresses: "Nuclear disarmament is not solely the province of nuclear weapon possessors. Nuclear weapons are a global humanitarian threat, and the responsibility to eliminate them lies with nuclear free states as much as it does with nuclear weapon possessors."

The signatories argue that nukes are indiscriminate weapons, whose effects cannot be limited or controlled. In fact, the use of even a small fraction of existing arsenals – more than 17,000 warheads – would disrupt the climate and threaten agricultural production, leading to the starvation of up to two billion people.

This is because, as was made clear by the Hiroshima Committee of Experts in their analysis of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima, "It is not possible to protect civilians from a nuclear weapons attack. To protect civilians, there is no measure other than to prevent a nuclear weapons attack from occurring, whether it be deliberate or accidental. To prevent the use of nuclear weapons, there is no way other than to abolish nuclear weapons themselves."

In an attempt to drive home the point, the signatories of the statement say: "Study upon study has pointed to the inability to prevent or care for civilian casualties on a mass scale. Mitigation is simply impossible for a weapon capable of producing temperatures comparable to the centre of the sun."

With an eye on states which tend to bury their heads in the sand, the statement adds: "Nuclear weapon possessors are, of course, not ignorant of the true effects of nuclear weapons, just as they are not ignorant of the double standard that is afforded these weapons compared to other weapons of mass destruction."

The statement adds: "The truth is that, for decades, nuclear weapons have been given an almost mythological status: they are seen as 'keepers of the peace' or 'necessary evils.' They have been transmuted into symbols of power and prestige for the political and military elites of nuclear possessor states."

While keeping the focus on the grave humanitarian impact of nukes, the eight 'confirmed signatories' of the ICAN statement emphasize: "Nuclear weapons are weapons -- not policy tools. No security doctrine or theory can completely obscure the fact that any use of nuclear weapons would entail catastrophic humanitarian consequences -- massive civilian casualties and irreparable damage to the environment, public health and the world economy."

The Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo held in March 2013, concluded that it would not be possible to coordinate and deliver any meaningful humanitarian response, to a catastrophe brought about by nuclear weapons. No international organization or state could adequately deal with the situation.

Experts pointed out at the Oslo conference that any use of nuclear weapons would eradicate hospitals, food, water and medical supplies, transportation and communications—infrastructure required for the treatment of survivors. They cautioned that physicians and paramedics arriving from outside would have to work without resources needed for effective treatment; furthermore, radiation, as we know from both Chernobyl and Fukushima, can make it impossible for rescuers to enter highly contaminated areas.

Legally binding instrument banning nukes

Against this backdrop, the ICAN statement signatories said: "Recognising the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons means taking a clear position against the acceptability of these weapons. It means clearly articulating that the possession and threat of use of nuclear weapons are directly opposed to humanitarian principles and formulating that stigma into a legally binding instrument which bans them outright."

Expanding this argument, ICAN campaigner Nosizwe Lise Baqwa said at the UN General Assembly on September 26: "That nuclear weapons have not already been clearly declared illegal for all, alongside the other prohibited weapons of mass destruction, is a failure of our collective social responsibility."

Speaking on behalf of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), she said: "The time has come for committed states to correct that failure. The time has come to ban nuclear weapons once and for all."

"The current framework provided for multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations has not been able to overcome the lack of political will of nuclear-armed states to comply with their obligations to disarm. Let us not allow deadlocks in meetings to be the legacy we leave behind us, for our children," she added.

Baqwa appeared to be sharing SGI President Ikeda's conviction, when she said: "A treaty banning nuclear weapons is achievable. It can be initiated by states that do not possess nuclear weapons. Nuclear-armed states should not be allowed to prevent such negotiations. We should not abandon productive or promising efforts in other forums, but neither should we ignore the opportunity that lies before us now, to make history."

*Ramesh Jaura is global editor of IDN and its sister publication Global Perspectives, chief editor of IPS Germany as well as editorial board member of Other News. He is also executive president of Global Cooperation Council, board member of IPS international and global coordinator of SGI-IPS project for strengthening public awareness of the need to abolish nukes. [IDN-InDepthNews – September 27, 2013] □

Image: UN General Assembly



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People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition
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MIDDLE EAST DOSSIER

Iran-US Relations: Restoration Benefits Both

By Nasser Saghafi-Ameri*

TEHRAN - After nearly 35 years of estrangement between Iran and the United States, a short phone call between President Rouhani and President Obama on September 27, 2013 culminated into a marathon diplomacy which started few days earlier at the United Nations and following the blessing of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in what he qualified as 'Heroic Flexibility'.

Although it is too early to speculate about the pace of the rapprochement between Iran and America, what is certain is that with direct talks between the two leaders at the highest level, the first major step toward normalization of relations has been taken. This development will have tremendous effects on the two countries' economic cooperation, as well as bringing about peace and stability in the region. The diplomatic contacts are especially important at a time that the region is going through a transitional phase and international efforts are needed to prevent further spread of extremism and terrorism. Both Iran and the U.S. have expressed their concerns over these phenomena and have common interests in fighting against them.

The mutual efforts by Iran and the U.S. for economic development plans in Afghanistan and Pakistan could also benefit these two nations who are suffering from terrorism and influence of extremist forces in their countries. However, despite much optimism on both sides the key question is the nuclear issue that lingers more than a decade. The issue has snowballed during the past years by mismanagement and unprofessional diplomacy among other things.

There is no doubt that nuclear issue takes the first priority in the future talks. These talks are scheduled to start in the framework of P5+1 (the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany) in October 2013 in Geneva.

Obviously, the concerns about Iran's intention can be alleviated when there is benevolence to build trust from both sides. On its part, Iran has expressed its willingness to fully cooperate and to provide sufficient guarantees to not opting for nuclear weapons in the context of a 'win-win' approach in the negotiations. Although it might sound a little idealistic at the moment, but a second track in the framework of bilateral negotiations between Iran and the United States could enhance the progress in the first track.

With some creative diplomacy and in contrast to its previous role as a spoiler in nuclear talks with Iran, Washington now has the chance to play a positive role as an accommodator in the future talks, easing the way toward successful bilateral relations with Iran. Yet, given the fact that the essence of the Iran-U.S. standoff derives from a deep-seated



mutual mistrust, drawing a road map with a clear endgame at the start of the negotiations seems imperative.

Two important areas

Thus, the opening in the Iran-U.S. relations may influence mainly two important areas: First, is the nuclear issue, where a second track on the nuclear talks would be established in a

bilateral framework and in parallel to the current P5+1 talk. Indeed in the Iran-US bilateral talks, the issue of sanctions looms high on the agenda. Presumably, in this fast track negotiation on the nuclear issues, the aim has to be reaching a timeframe for lifting the sanctions which are not only crucial in the progress of the rapprochement between Tehran and Washington, but it could have much advantageous consequence for the future trade and investment between the two sides.

Despite three decades of sanctions Iran has developed much in terms of technology and industry, yet its vast economic potentials for trade and investment has to be tapped. In this respect, it seems that at present there are three areas in the Iranian economy that are more promising for cooperation with their respective counterparts in the United States.

These are:

1- Energy sector; including oil, gas, electricity and renewable energies (wind, sun and thermal). Iran has developed necessary skills and technological base in all of the said energy areas. Iran has also developed considerable capacity in the oil and gas pipeline schemes both for transportation of oil and gas for its domestic use or for the export. Flow of the new investments and transfer of technology could boost this sector many folds. American companies are one of the best in these fields and they could also benefit a lot from cooperating with Iranian oil companies at international level.

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2- Purchase of new fleet of airliners. Iran has long complained about illegality of sanctions on purchase of new aircrafts for its airliners. There is a potential market for U.S. aircraft industries in Iran that could tap billions of dollars for those companies once the unilateral sanctions by Washington are lifted.

3- Auto industry in Iran is another area of interest for American companies. This sector has gained much support from the Iranian government in the past. Its production peaked over million vehicles two years ago. However, due to the sanctions and lack of competition in the domestic market it has suffered a setback in introducing new technologies and satisfying consumers. With the lifting of sanctions, major automakers in the U.S. would be able to enter the flourishing auto market in Iran through investment and shared production.

Second, is the question of regional security and co-operation. It is widely believed that finally the global democratic wave has arrived in the Arab world and to the regimes which are typically allies of the West. The precarious situation in the Arab world and possible spread of upheavals to the countries in the Arabian Peninsula calls for caution and consultation between Iran and the United States.

These two regional and extra-regional powers find their interests in stability of the region while peaceful reforms are taking place. For that purpose, destabilizing effects of democratic changes similar to what happened in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya should be avoided by taking precautionary measures while there would be guarantees for rapid and unhindered transition to democracy.

Presently, some countries in the regions adjacent to Iran namely in the Middle East and South Asia are experiencing volatile upheavals. The situation in Syria and Iraq on the western borders of Iran and Afghanistan and Pakistan on its eastern borders is alarming and calls for immediate attention.

The U.S. has been militarily involved directly in Iraq and Afghanistan and it has threatened to intervene in Syria. Thanks to Iranian and Russian initiative for Syria's chemical weapons disarmament that has thwarted U.S. military intervention and plunging in another war in the volatile Middle East region.

Evidently, for some regional allies of the U.S. such as Israel or Saudi Arabia the prospect of even a non-nuclear Iran, reenergized economically by the lifting of sanctions, and politically more powerful with the renewed relations with Washington is not a comfortable scenario. During the last three decades, they have enjoyed Iran's absence from the scene and it is unlikely that they would easily adapt themselves to the new situation where they consider that a shift in the balance of power toward Iran is imminent.

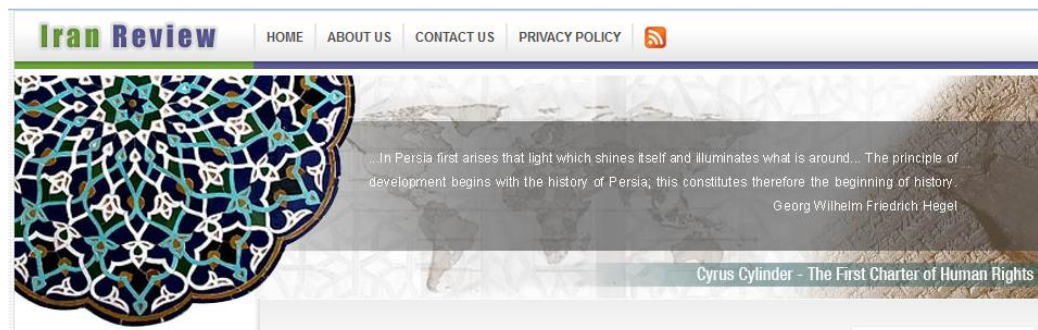
The simple act of two presidents of Iran and America in talking directly has infuriated Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli hardliners who see that all of their false propaganda since 1985 mentioning that Iran was only months away from having a nuclear bomb is becoming useless and absurd.

At the strategic level, while Israel and some Arab countries in the Persian Gulf tend to perceive these relations merely affects the balance of power in the Middle East and North Africa, it certainly has much wider implications for strategically important regions adjacent to Iran, such as the Caspian Sea area, where Russian interests are involved or in the West Asia, where besides India and Pakistan the crisis in Afghanistan is still much alive. That region is also adjacent to China and heart of Asia, where Obama administration's strategic "pivot" from the Middle East to Asia is aimed at.

Challenges

Although the Iran-US relations have entered a new phase with new dynamism but this would not suggest, as both sides have conceded that the task ahead is not without challenges. The momentum that started at the current UN General Assembly has already faced some hurdles by conservatives in both countries. While the recent telephone conversation between the leaders of two nations was symbolically very important, but it has to be considered as the first step in a long way ahead.

Indeed, in the context of the new diplomatic practices, both sides are now able to engage in a meaningful diplomatic dialogue for reaching agreement on vast pending issues; keeping in mind that Iran and the United States need each other and their collaboration can have a positive effect on establishing peace and stability in the Middle East and South Asia. [IDN-InDepthNews – October 10, 2013] □



MIDDLE EAST DOSSIER

Iran and P5+1 Take One More Step Toward Mutual Confidence Building

By Hassan Beheshtipour*

TEHRAN - The fourth round of negotiations between representatives of Iran and the P5+1 group of world powers (USA, Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany), which ended on October 16, 2013, was a great leap ahead for both sides and a solid measure aimed at mutual trust building.

The two-day talks in Geneva were very remarkable for the Iranian side because serious negotiations had gotten underway again after a hiatus of several months. By offering a new proposal which was too attractive for the Western states to reject, Iran proved that it is ready to reach a comprehensive and complete understanding with the West over its peaceful nuclear energy program.



From the viewpoint of the Western countries, Iran's plan and its focus on the main details was very considerable because it showed that if the West recognized Iran's right to enrich uranium on its soil, Iran would be ready to increase transparency of its nuclear activities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In this way, the West would not have any doubt that Iran is merely following uranium enrichment within framework of peaceful nuclear activities.

It was clear since the very outset that due to profound distrust on both sides, an agreement could not be expected to be reached within one or two sessions of intense negotiations. Therefore, the fact that both sides agreed to issue a joint statement after six years of talks, was indicative of their will to open a new road for confidence building.

It seems that establishment of three specialized committees to delve into the scientific aspects of the case, sanctions, and disarmament was a basic strategy, which will pave the way for preliminary measures that will be taken following the next round of talks which have been scheduled to be held three weeks later in Geneva.

The three committees are supposed to provide grounds for the removal of anti-Iran sanctions, determine the quality of future nuclear cooperation between the two sides and also to discuss ways of making sure about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities. The result of their work will be offered to the next meeting between Iran and the P5+1 as an official report.

Ten steps

From a logical viewpoint, in order for the next round of talks to be successful, the following measures should be taken:

1. Both sides should accept that the obligations should be mutual and balanced. That is, if an agreement is to be reached in a win-win manner, commitments should be bilateral and, as much as possible, equal in importance. In that case, there would be hope in the accurate implementation of such an agreement.

2. Both sides are going to move toward each other in an effort to build trust. Therefore, nobody can expect one side to stand motionless and wait for the other side to take the next steps. Naturally, "cooperation" could only come true and continue through "synergy" between the two sides.

3. Curbing the existing opposition on both sides in order to prevent such opposition from negatively affecting the agreements is an unavoidable must for the continuation of future cooperation. Of course, it is clear that nobody can muffle opposition, but the opposition can be managed properly if the two sides actually believe in the progress of their work.

4. If trust building steps start with the recognition of Iran's right to enrich uranium, they will help to cut the Gordian knot of the negotiations in the shortest possible time.

5. Iran's proposed plan has envisaged three stages which are inseparable and should be carried out in a step by step manner. That is, implementation of each stage depends on the full implementation of the previous one. In this model, progress in any stage will build trust for the implementation of the next stages by both sides. Therefore, there could be no concern about non-implementation of any of these three stages because both sides will only set out to implement every stage when they have made sure about the completion of the previous stage.

*A researcher, documentary producer, and expert on nuclear issues, Hassan Beheshtipour was born on June 22, 1961 in Tehran. He received his BA in Trade Economics from Tehran University. His research topics span from U.S. and Russian foreign policy to the Ukrainian Orange Revolution. This article, which was published on October 19 in Iran Review, is being reproduced by arrangement with them. | *Image above: Iran Review*

6. Iran's proposed plan is so comprehensive and complete that the opposite party has no pretext to oppose it. It has provided logical answers to questions about what should be done by each party in which manner and in what period of time. Therefore, failure of this plan will make it clear for everybody that what people and for what reasons are not willing to achieve a logical, comprehensive and complete agreement with Iran over its proposed plan.

7. By proposing a timed plan, Iran will strip the Western media of their usual propaganda claim about Iran trying to kill time and buy more time in order to finish its nuclear work. Therefore, the time is ripe for the Western side to take advantage of this historical opportunity, discard the policy of "negotiation for negotiation" and once and for all, try to achieve a final agreement with Iran according to a serious schedule.

8. It is imperative for the West to replace its past erroneous policy of "negotiations and pressure" with a new policy of "cooperation and negotiations" when the process of confidence building is complete. Such an approach will lead to sustainability and continuation of any agreement coming out of the negotiations.

9. Undoubtedly, putting an end to the imposition of new sanctions against Iran and removal of the previous ones would be possible on the order of [the US President Barack] Obama. This will further improve the atmosphere of future

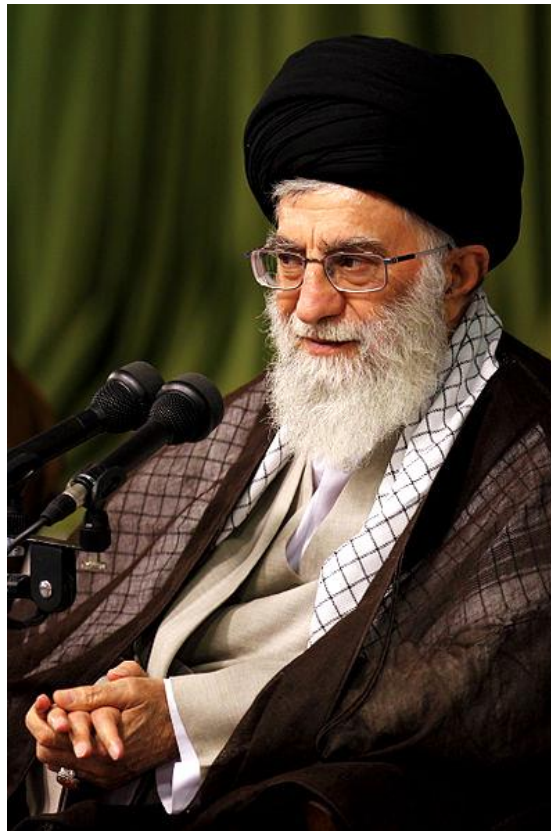
negotiations and will provide the Iranian team of negotiators with more maneuvering room in order to achieve new and more important agreements. This measure will also send a clear message to Tehran about the extent to which the United States is ready to correct its erroneous policies of the past.

10. Iran and member states of the P5+1 have found the path to constructive interaction and achieving a lingua franca. So, in order to avert facing new obstacles on this tortuous path, they should use the past as a guide for building a better future. Although past experiences have been bitter and difficult, both sides have learnt good lessons from them.

Iran's new proposal has paved the way for further progress in negotiations. It seems that the time is ripe for a comprehensive agreement between Iran and the West and we can almost hope that Israel's obstructionist measures would not be able to take the new situation to the state of limbo which existed in the past.

The West knows that if the new opportunity is lost, it would not be repeated. If Iran's "heroic resilience," which aims to verify the true intent of the United States and its allies, is understood wrongly, a new round of confrontation will take the place of constructive interaction. In that case, both sides would be caught in a lose-lose game.

[IDN-InDepthNews – October 21, 2013] □



Ali Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader of Iran.

MIDDLE EAST DOSSIER

The Continuing Agony Of Syria

By Jayantha Dhanapala*

KANDY, Sri Lanka - The United Nations rose to one of its finest moments when the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2118(2013) on the September 27 addressing the outrageous use of chemical weapons in Syria while setting guidelines for a political solution to the civil war in that country. Great powers can sometimes agree to use diplomacy wisely to save the world from conflict. However the assumption that the Syrian crisis has been solved through a U.S.-Russian agreement on Syria's chemical weapons hides the ugly reality of a continuing civil war with daily death tolls adding to a total of about 100,000, a suffering populace and an exodus of refugees now numbering 1.9 million apart from the displaced.

Certainly the world was saved from another display of arrogant adventurism by self-appointed global policemen without the legality of a UN Security Council resolution converting yet another Arab country into the same sectarian disunity that engulfs Iraq and Libya after regime change was achieved there. Obama failed to persuade his own Congress and his war-weary public that the Assad regime was guilty of using chemical weapons on August 21 in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta and had therefore to be punished with air strikes without waiting for the UN inspectors report. There are a number of lessons to be drawn from this while reaffirming the need for a political solution to the Syrian conflict beginning with a Geneva II conference.

Having rashly proclaimed the red line of chemical weapon use as a trigger for U.S. military action, President Obama tolerated several earlier incidents until the August 21 use. This horrifying incident took place, interestingly, after the UN inspectors were permitted entry into Syria with the consent of the Assad regime.

Obama promptly concluded that there had in fact been chemical weapons use and that it was by the Syrian regime and not the rebels. Subsequent revelations hint that US intelligence that he relied on was doctored. The U.S. President, who ironically had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize soon after his first election, called for military strikes without putting U.S. boots on the ground.

Prime Minister Cameron of UK fell into line, rather like the way Blair supported Bush over Iraq. The important difference was that with strong public opinion polls both in the US and UK opposing military action, Obama and Cameron cautiously decided to consult their legislatures. The British House of Commons voted 285-272 against any intervention and with many of his backbenchers and his Liberal-Democrat partners also joining in the opposition, Cameron backed down.



Not so Obama who pressed on, no doubt influenced by the pro-Israeli lobby led by the powerful American Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC), addressing the nation and proposing a resolution in Congress despite voices against it. Faced with imminent defeat Obama was thrown a political lifeline by an ingenious Russian diplomatic move, which could prove to be the game changer. At the same time leaked CIA files proved the U.S. knowingly helped Saddam Hussein use chemical weapons against Iran in 1988 with intelligence on Iranian troop formations, location and movements. In a climactic week what appeared to be an inevitable attack on Syria by some Western powers turned

into a constructive diplomatic negotiation to seek peaceful solutions.

Sergei Lavrov, Russia's brilliant Foreign Minister who began his career in Colombo where he studied Sinhala, proposed international custody of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. Assad went even further offering to surrender all his weapons and join the Chemical Weapons Convention, which they had avoided because of Israel's nuclear weapons.

Events proceeded quickly with Putin rubbing in the humiliation of Obama with an op-ed in the New York Times addressing the people of the U.S. over the heads of its leaders. He warned, "A strike would increase violence and unleash a new wave of terrorism. It could undermine multilateral efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and further destabilize the Middle East and North Africa. It could throw the entire system of international law and order out of balance."

*Jayantha Dhanapala is currently President of the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize recipient the Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs, a former UN Under-Secretary-General and a former Ambassador of Sri Lanka. An amazing chutzpah

Despite Russia's support for Syria and her supply of arms to the Assad regime this warning resonated around the world. The Lavrov-Kerry meeting in Geneva worked hard to come out with a balanced agreement which was greeted by relief by all except of course Israel and France. The latter under a Socialist President Hollande, in marked contrast to the more conservative President Jacques Chirac who opposed Bush strongly over Iraq in 2003, announced support for Obama and for the Syrian rebels.

The UN Secretary-General while condemning the use of chemical weapons was consistent in urging member states to wait for the report of his experts and warned against action outside the UN Charter. The UN's mandate was to find out whether chemical weapons had been used and not who used them.

There is an amazing chutzpah on the part of the U.S., France and Israel, as possessor states of the most destructive weapons of mass destruction – the nuclear weapon – in their reaction to chemical weapons. A statement issued by the Nobel Peace Prize recipient the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs stated, inter alia:

“Rather than a limited military intervention with unclear goals, a cessation of all war-related actions should be promoted, by engaging in an all-inclusive dialogue including the government of Syria, the representatives of opposition, the neighbouring countries (including Iran, Saudi Arabia), as well as NATO countries and Russia. The universalization of the CWC and the dismantlement of CW stockpiles is a goal that needs to be prioritized and plans should be discussed for how to achieve a Syria free of chemical weapons following the cessation of the current conflict. Events in Syria reinforce the urgent need for a Middle East WMD Free Zone.

“The conference called for by the NPT Review Conference in 2010 for 2012 should be held with utmost urgency. Those countries who believe the use of military force is a viable option following an alleged attack, but who block efforts to convene meetings that could lead to the eradication of these weapons from regional arsenals, bear some responsibility for the deepening quagmire in the Middle East.”

Hans Blix who headed UNMOVIC, the UN body vested with the verification and destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, wisely observed: “The political dynamics are running ahead of due process.”

Another expert, Professor Ramesh Thakur, wrote: “The one significant development since 2003 is the unanimous adoption of the responsibility to protect (R2P) norm in 2005. As one of the main authors of the original R2P report in 2001, let me say two things. First, the use of chemical weapons

does constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity, thereby triggering R2P, which covers four atrocity crimes in all (the others being genocide and ethnic cleansing). The U.N. secretary general's special advisers were right to call attention to this. If use is proven and guilt established, the U.N. as the custodian of our collective conscience must take appropriately tough action and hold the perpetrators criminally accountable. But (second), they failed to speak truth to power by not emphasizing, at a time when the FUKUS leaders were uttering public threats of military strikes unilaterally if necessary, that R2P action must be U.N. -authorized, in conformity with the U.N. Charter, and for civilian protection, not punishment.....If NATO were to launch military strikes on Syria by misusing R2P language, they will kill R2P.”

“R2P” as a concept in international relations has already lost credibility in the UN since the West transformed it into a tool of their own policies for selective regime change. A resolution in the Security Council seeking military action in Syria is certain to be vetoed by both Russia and China and any NATO action thereafter would spark global outrage and tragic consequences for the Middle East with spiraling terrorism, sectarian violence and no prospect of regional peace for the immediate future.

The only country this will satisfy would be Israel who is feeding the neo-conservative lobby in the U.S. against Assad and the Iranian regime which, after the election of Rouhani, has demonstrated a willingness to talk to Obama to resolve the issue of its nuclear programme through diplomacy.

The process of chemical weapons inspection and destruction will take time and money. The time can be used for diplomacy. The money for the Hague-based Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) should ideally come from the BRICS, and especially China, which must contribute towards the solution of global problems commensurate with her growing economic power and political influence.

Syria has already furnished records of its chemical weapons arsenal, which must of course be verified. That opportunity could be used to accelerate the search for a political solution and the convening of Geneva II under the wise guidance of veteran Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi.

If meanwhile evidence is produced by an impartial and credible source that the now proven use of chemical weapons was by the Assad regime then a process approved by the Security Council must be launched to prosecute him and his associates in the International Criminal Court. [IDN-InDepthNews – September 30, 2013] □

“R2P” as a concept in international relations has already lost credibility in the UN since the West transformed it into a tool of their own policies for selective regime change. A resolution in the Security Council seeking military action in Syria is certain to be vetoed by both Russia and China and any NATO action thereafter would spark global outrage and tragic consequences for the Middle East with spiraling terrorism, sectarian violence and no prospect of regional peace for the immediate future.

MIDDLE EAST DOSSIER

Syria Starts Abandoning Chemical Weapons

By Richard Johnson

THE HAGUE – When the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) enters into force for Syria on October 14, 2013, the country will become the 190th Member State of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), according to the Hague-based global watchdog.

The CWC – or the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction – is the most recent arms control agreement with the force of International law. This agreement outlaws the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons. It is administered by the OPCW, an independent organization.

Of the stockpiles, 44,131 of the 71,194 tonnes declared (61.99%) have been destroyed. The OPCW has conducted 4,167 inspections at 195 chemical weapon-related and 1,103 industrial sites. These inspections have affected the sovereign territory of 81 States Parties since April 1997. Worldwide, 4,913 industrial facilities are subject to inspection provisions.

The OPCW pointed out on September 16 that Syria was joining the Convention against the backdrop of unusual circumstances. Therefore it envisaged that the programme to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria will be initiated “in a matter of days”.

The global watchdog said: “Syria will provide, on an expeditious basis, a complete inventory of its chemical weapons, production facilities, and related materials to the OPCW. Our experts will verify the accuracy of this disclosure with on-site inspections, and will also assist in putting into place arrangements to keep the warfare materials and the relevant facilities secure until their destruction.”

Syria submitted September 20 “an initial declaration” on the chemical weapons it possesses, meeting the first deadline set down by the framework agreement Russia and the United States concluded in Geneva to deter Western military strikes.

According to the OPCW Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü, the confirmation by the UN Mission’s report that chemical weapons were indeed used in Syria “clearly makes it all the more important to ensure that the programme for chemical demilitarisation in Syria succeeds”.

Nine OPCW inspectors participated in the UN investigation of alleged use in Syria, and OPCW experts are already at work preparing a roadmap that anticipates the various challenges involved in verifying Syria’s declared stockpiles.



Üzümcü, said: “I am aware of the onerous responsibility that the international community is placing on our shoulders. I and my team approach this with a sense of destiny because so much is at stake. We will bring to bear on this mission our full energies and commitment, and I have every confidence that the international community will support us fully.”

The Chemical Weapons Convention represents the sole multilateral mechanism to rid the world of these terrible weapons of mass destruction. As its implementing body, the OPCW, with over 16 years of experience, possesses the necessary skills and capacities to undertake such missions.

Under the Chemical Weapons Convention (1993), there is a legally binding worldwide ban on the production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons and their precursors. Notwithstanding, large stockpiles thereof continue to exist, usually only as a precaution against putative use by an aggressor.

But international law has prohibited the use of chemical weapons since 1899, under the Hague Convention: Article 23 of the Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land adopted by the First Hague Conference “especially” prohibited employing “poison and poisoned arms”; also, a separate Declaration stated that in any war between signatory powers, the parties would abstain from using projectiles “the object of which is the diffusion of asphyxiating or deleterious gases”.

The Washington Naval Treaty, signed February 6, 1922, also known as the Five-Power Treaty, aimed at banning CW – but did not succeed because the French rejected it. The subsequent failure to include CW has contributed to the resultant increase in stockpiles.

The Geneva Protocol, officially known as the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, is an International treaty prohibiting the use of chemical and biological weapons. It was signed at Geneva June 17, 1925 and entered into force on February 8, 1928. 133 nations are listed as state parties to the treaty – Ukraine acceded August 7, 2003 and is the most recent member nation.

This treaty states that chemical and biological weapons are "justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilised world." While the treaty prohibits the use of chemical and biological weapons, it does not address the production, storage, or transfer of these weapons. Later treaties would address these omissions and have been enacted.

Framework

In the September 14 Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons that would lead to the elimination of Syria's chemical weapon stockpiles by mid-2014 the United States and Russia express their "joint determination to ensure the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons program (CW) in the soonest and safest manner".

According to media reports, the Framework was welcomed by France, Germany, Britain, the European Union, China, and the Arab League. Israel expressed cautious optimism, but was sceptical that Syria would comply.

Ali Haidar, Syrian Minister of National Reconciliation, praised the agreement as "a victory for Syria that was achieved thanks to our Russian friends." He described the agreement as removing a pretext for a U.S. attack on the country. Iran also stated that the agreement had deprived the U.S. of a pretext for attacking Syria.

'Free Syrian Army' General Salim Idris denounced the initiative. Referencing the August 2013 Ghouta chemical attacks, he stated that "a crime against humanity has been committed, and there is not any mention [in the agreement] of accountability".

The Syrian government blamed rebels for that attack and for all other chemical weapons attacks in Syria. In response to

the Ghouta events, a coalition of countries led by the U.S. and France threatened air strikes on Syria.

In the Framework accord USA and Russia concur that a UN Security Council resolution should provide for review on a regular basis the implementation in Syria of the decision of the Executive Council of the OPCW, and in the event of non-compliance, including unauthorized transfer, or any use of chemical weapons by anyone in Syria, the UN Security Council should impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The proposed joint US-Russian OPCW draft decision supports the application of Article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which provides for the referral of any cases of non-compliance to the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.

The Framework states that in furtherance of the objective to eliminate the Syrian chemical weapons program, USA and Russia have reached a shared assessment of the amount and type of chemical weapons involved, and are committed to the immediate international control over chemical weapons and their components in Syria.

"We set ambitious goals for the removal and destruction of all categories of CW related materials and equipment with the objective of completing such removal and destruction in the first half of 2014. In addition to chemical weapons, stocks of chemical weapons agents, their precursors, specialized CW equipment, and CW munitions themselves, the elimination process must include the facilities for the development and production of these weapons."

[IDN-InDepthNews – September 20, 2013] □

Photo on page 26: Pallets of 155 mm artillery shells containing "HD" (distilled sulfur mustard agent) at Pueblo Depot Activity (PUDA) chemical weapons storage facility | Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad

MIDDLE EAST DOSSIER

A Complicated US-Russia Power Game in Syria

By Reza Hojjat Shamami*

TEHRAN - Without a doubt, during these days that the international community is grappling with the Syria crisis, a new sensitive and determining chapter is being opened for the international world order. Of course, the ongoing developments inside Syria do not constitute the main reason for this situation, but it is more a result of a complicated power game, especially between the United States and Russia.

As a result, continuation of this trend can lead to the stabilization or change of the existing structure of international world system. Since August 21, when a chemical weapons attack was carried out in Ghouta, an eastern suburb of the Syrian capital, Damascus, the type of position taken by the American officials as well as some of their allies such as the UK, has practically pushed the world to the brink of a new war in the Middle East.



Syrian President] Bashar Assad, helped the crisis in Syria to run deep.

As a result, about 30 months after the beginning of developments in the Arab country, there is no clear way to get out of the existing dire situation. Therefore, Syria has turned into a Gordian knot for the world and is now serving as gravitational center of international developments which take place among big powers. Apart from developments which

This is especially true since the US President Barack Obama had already warned in 2012 that the use of chemical weapons was Washington's red line in Syria developments. Here, the red line is quite clear in meaning and no other wise interpretation can be offered for it except for the United States readiness to attack Syria. This attack, however, has not taken place yet and one may even claim that the intensity of propaganda in favor of such attack has somehow decreased compared to the early propaganda onslaught against Damascus.

What is currently going on in Syria is a result of developments whose early phases sparked in the concluding days of 2009. At that time, those developments came to be known as the "Arab Spring" in international media, while Iran considered them as the "Islamic Awakening." Up to March 2011, Syria had largely stayed away from the wave of political developments which swept through Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen like a game of domino, but it was finally engulfed by the conflagration.

The difference, however, was that from the standpoint of American politicians, the quality and perspective of developments in Syria was quite different from what other countries believed to be the case. Syria was a country opposing the US policies and the crisis in that country should have been taken advantage of in a different manner in order to both control and manage the ongoing developments in the region, and create a rift in the anti-American alliance which had taken shape in the Middle East.

The kind of positions taken on the Syria unrest by regional countries that were allies to the United States such as Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan, as well as certain mistakes committed by the government of [the incumbent

have taken place in the past few years and the type of roles played by various players, Syria has currently turned into a haven for fundamentalist ideologies which have been lying low for the past few decades, and here exists the real threat. A quick review of the composition of opposition groups in Syria will prove that, at least, three different groups are currently involved in the Syria conflict.

The first group consists of the Free Syrian Army and other groups that are close to Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and are also supported by the United States, the European Union, Turkey, and Qatar. They represent the minimum degree of what the West pursues in Syria. Of course, among these groups there are streaks of Salafi ideas which cannot be separated from the whole groups due to intensity and depth of the ongoing developments in the Arab country.

The second group represents Salafi tendencies, and is trusted and supported by the government of Saudi Arabia, while the third group, whose networked organization is much more dangerous, is actually affiliated to Al-Qaeda.

Out of these three groups, the Arabic-Egyptian network of the Muslim Brotherhood has been active in politics for more than 80 years and its targets are not only the countries in the Middle East, but also other countries outside this critical region.

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It is noteworthy that the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria came into being about one decade after the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. On the other hand, Salafi tendencies have been on the rise in various countries of the Middle East since the Saudi royal house snatched the power in Saudi Arabia and the Saudi government started to increase its economic clout. There have been many occasions in which even the United States has been targeting the positions of Salafi extremists in other countries, including in Africa.

This issue is also a matter of dispute and point of difference between the United States and Saudi Arabia, but has drawn less attention despite the fact that the gap between the two sides in this regard is quite profound. It has been due to a host of common grounds existing between the United States and Saudi Arabia as well as the silence they have generally observed with regard to their differences that such a deep rift between Washington and Riyadh has largely gone unnoticed.

The third group, which represents the mainstay of the afore-said political and religious radicalism and is actually a reaction to the Western liberalism, is affiliated to Al-Qaeda, which has established a nearly global network with its roots running deep in some Islamic countries of the Middle East.

There is a sort of reproduced relationship between the Al-Qaeda network and the United States. Washington has traditionally stood for the liberalistic ideas and during the Cold War and even after it, it has regularly taken a radical and even eliminatory approach to Communism followed by the political Islam. Not only according to clear admission of the former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, this group was created by the United States during the invasion of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union, but the radical liberal approach taken by the United States to the Islamic world, has in fact paved the way for the reproduction of such fundamentalism.

Therefore, what we are currently seeing in Syria has been created by an interlink of these three groups which, when taken into account along with their offshoots, form about 50 armed groups, which makes it very difficult to fight them in the battlefield. In the meantime, the behavior and demands of the Kurdish population in Syria and other regional countries should not be ignored.

US in doubt and horror for accepting change!

The United States is one of the most important and the most influential players in Syria developments and it has a large battery of instruments and reasons to play such a role. Following the recent chemical weapons attack in Syria, the foreign policy and military orientations of the United States have been leaning toward military strike on Syria. This issue was proclaimed by US politicians through US propaganda machine in such a way that the world public opinion has so far accepted the necessity of a military strike on Syria, though not its legitimacy. After a few days, however, Washington showed a meaningful withdrawal from its previous position. To discuss the main reason behind the United

States early withdrawal a few issues should be taken into consideration.

First of all, President Barack Obama tried throughout his election campaign in late 2008 to introduce himself through a multilateral approach to international issues by distancing from the unilateral policies that the United States had pursued during the eight years that led to his election. Withdrawing the American troops from Iraq and the plan to do the same in Afghanistan by 2014 were telltale signs that he did not think about the continuation of those wars, let alone waging a new war.

The second reason is the Nobel Peace Prize which was conferred on him during early months of his presidential term due to the pacifist positions that he had taken. As a result, the general mental image of Obama is that of a president who thinks about international peace and calm more than anything else.

The next issue is about the differences and divides that have taken shape among big powers of the world. There are many signs that the international system and policies of governments have greatly changed since two decades ago. Apart from the approach taken by Russia and China to international developments, there are differences and gaps over these issues between the European countries and the United States. Germany has been constantly among less boisterous critics of the United States policies.

However, the most surprising turn of events which was witnessed in recent days in the thick of debates over a military strike on Syria was the behavior demonstrated by the UK, which has been known as an unquestioning ally of the United States during all its past wars. Although the conservative British Prime Minister David Cameron has been among the first political figures to encourage a war against Syria, he failed to convince the British parliament to lend its backing to such an attack.

A review of past history shows that since 1782, that is, when the Americans were engaged in a war of independence from the United Kingdom, the British parliament has backed all bills offered to it by the government to wage war on other countries. That trend, however, reached its end in the case of the United States war on Syria. It is interesting that even 10 ministers of Cameron's Cabinet had voted negative for the bill.

Although the United States willingness for launching a military strike against Syria has not decreased yet, the UK parliament's decisions shows that a lot of change is in the offing. It also proves that the overall structure of international system is changing and the world is getting out of a transitional period and entering a new period of stability. Of course, this process has been accompanied with a lot of tension and the people of Syria are bearing its brunt.

The kind of positions taken by the United States foreign and military policies, as well as the international conditions show that if the United States refrained from attacking Syria,

it would be taken as Washington's acceptance of a process of change, which will gradually lead the world toward a "new international order" in which Russia, China as well as their friends and allies will be playing an active role. Taking such an approach, at least by the incumbent US administration, will only mean this. However, by letting the Congress make the final decision, Obama is trying to make the Republicans a partner to the Syria crisis, so that, in case of possible failure he will have a potential way out.

Russia welcomes change!

During past centuries, Russia has proven itself as one of the influential powers in various areas. This issue has been clearly witnessed in various junctures of the Russian history under the rule of Communist and Tsarist governments as well as under the Russian empire. Therefore, the country has always enjoyed an international character and prestige and has been able to increase its power.

Of course, the rise in the Russian power has seen periods of interruption in various historical junctures, which has been usually experienced by other countries as well. The 1990s was one of those junctures. Despite its weakening on international level, even in that juncture, Russia was seeking a way to regain its power and this happened in the 2000s with the election of Vladimir Putin as the Russian president.

Putin's determination to restore Russia to power can be better seen since the beginning of his third term in office as the president of Russia which started in 2012 and is expected to continue up to 2024. During the early 1990s and in view of unrestrained unilateral approach taken by the former US President George W. Bush, which caused the United States to wage war against Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia refrained from taking a hostile stance on the US foreign policy.

At that time, necessary grounds for taking a clear position in the face of the United States were lacking in Russia. Putin even voted in favor the United Nations Security Council resolution for the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011, though with certain amendments. However, Moscow also issued stern warnings in the face of NATO's mistakes in Libya. Following the invasion of Libya, Russia found its way paved to achieve its ambitious goals such as reemerging as

a superpower and playing its role in changing the existing structure of international political order.

As a result of the above developments, a certain kind of faceoff is now under way between the two power poles in Syria, which has been construed as the first step taken toward a new era of "warm peace" between Moscow and Washington. Under these circumstances, if the United States actually attacks Syria, it will prove that Washington is not willing for Russia to sway considerable power in international world system.

By doing this, all Putin's aspirations and efforts will be lost, at least, for many years to come. In this sense, however, an attack on Syria will be an attack on Russia and Russians have already indicated that they would not remain indifferent to such an assault.

However, if the United States refrained from attacking Syria, it would mean that Washington has not only accepted to allow Russia back into large-scale international political games, but has also given in to inevitable changes in international system and is ready for a step-by-step withdrawal from the leadership of the unipolar world. This issue has been already highlighted by the former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who has noted that through his behavior, Obama has caused the world to feel a leadership vacuum.

Of course, Putin is quite aware that his country is facing a lot of problems in its march toward its goals. The United States clandestine plans to bring about the collapse of the Russian Federation, as it did in the case of the Soviet Union; fomenting political and religious tensions both inside and along the borders of Russia; in addition to waging economic and security wars against Russia, are just a few problems that Russia will be facing in its endeavor to regain its power on an international level.

Putin, however, seems to be determined to bring about "change," which would be Obama's original election motto coming true in the Kremlin. Therefore, forthcoming developments in international arena, especially in Syria, will make it clear in which direction the world will move in coming years. [IDN-InDepthNews – September 10, 2013] □



http://www.iras.ir/en/

MIDDLE EAST DOSSIER

Grounds For Optimism In Egypt

By Ismail Serageldin*

ALEXANDIRA - Violence is about in the land. The young, the idealists and the dutiful, along with the fanatics, are dying in the streets and the hamlets of Egypt. Hatred and attacks on the Christian minority have reared their ugly head again. Differences of opinion escalate into confrontation, and the declaration of a state of emergency and the imposition of a curfew have formally underlined the gravity of the situation.

The horror of the dead bodies, the agony of the wounded and the waves of grief that are besieging Egyptian society, alternating with moments of anger and vengefulness all cry out for reason, compassion and a willingness to reach out to the other, whatever their views, that the nation may reconcile, heal its wounds and continue its journey to build its second republic on firm humanistic values and solid democratic institutional foundations. But are we condemned to enter into a cycle of violence that begets more violence and descend into autocracy? Or is it still possible to dream of transcending that violence and getting back on track to build our common future?

I believe that we not only can get back on track to build our second republic, but even that we have some important positive factors that we could build on to create that desirable democratic future. Despite the disastrous violence plaguing Egypt at present, I have long maintained that there are six very good reasons to be optimistic about the future. Six reasons to believe that Egypt may come out of its ordeal towards a basically democratic future . . .

First: The basically non-violent nature of the Egyptian people:

Egypt has generally been a non-violent society. The people have a revulsion against bloodletting and are sure to demand a return to more normal and less confrontational relations in the not too distant future.

Second: Commitment to the idea of law and the rulings of judges:

Egyptians have shown an enormous commitment to the law and the judiciary.

Who can imagine that you could sue Bashar El Assad in court? Or Khomeini for that matter? But that is what has been going on in Egypt. Both the Muslim Brotherhood and the secularists have been fighting many of their skirmishes since the revolution of 2011 through filing briefs in various courts, administrative, criminal or constitutional.

The complaints include whether Mr. Morsi was legitimately capable of replacing the general prosecutor, whether the committee that drafted the constitution he sponsored was legally constituted, etc. etc.

Egyptians want the judges to supervise their elections, and – when they are not seeking friendly settlement – generally want to arbitrate their disputes in court.



Ismail Serageldin speaking at the inauguration of the Sadat Museum.

Third: Freedom of expression and diversity of opinions expressed:

There has never been more freedom of expression than since the revolution of 2011. The numbers of newspapers and TV channels of every stripe has exploded. The boundaries of decorum have been breached. And the debate is vigorous even if some of it is also slanderous or driven by wild conspiracy theories.

Maintaining that new found freedom is essential, which is why the closures of TV channels and the incarceration of journalists and broadcasters must be condemned. Charges of incitation to violence and hate speech towards minorities have to be challenged and have to be proven in court. All such calls for the unity of the country and national security

have to be balanced against the necessity to support freedom of expression.

Fourth: Ballots not bullets:

We have had seven electoral rounds: the first referendum in 2011, which regrettably supported going to elections without first adopting a new constitution, and two electoral rounds each for the lower house, the upper house and the presidency. That does not count the rushed constitutional referendum of December 2012, which came two weeks after releasing the text to be adopted. All of these elections were orderly, fair and transparent. The Egyptian people showed that they can settle their differences with Ballots and not bullets.

Fifth: An unprecedented level of public participation:

The miracle of revolution of 2011, has been the sudden and almost magical awakening of the Egyptian people from their apathy. Everyone is engaged. Distinguished professors and upper-class society ladies that would have never thought of demonstrating in the street are now participating in marches and sit-ins. Poorer families who seemed more intent on just earning their daily bread are now actively involved in the political process. Within every home, every family, there are vigorous debates. The public demonstrations have unprecedented numbers of participants. That augurs well for a vigorous participation in a future democratic system.

Sixth: The deeply divided country:

Last but not least is a counter intuitive observation: the country is deeply divided. I would have been much more concerned if either Mr. Morsi or Mr. Shafik had won the presidential elections by say 75-80% of the vote. Then the tendency to bulldoze the minority would have been unstoppable. But despite Mr. Shafik's political baggage of being the personification of a return to the Mubarak regime, the votes were almost 50-50. This division means that neither side will be able to totally eradicate the other. They will come into conflict time and again until, like two exhausted boxers in the fifteenth round, they come to the conclusion that they will not be able to knock the other out of the ring.

The Islamists who want an avowedly Islamic State with distinct characteristics, and those who do not (Muslims and Christians alike) will have to reach the conclusion that they are both part of the body politic of Egypt, that both are interwoven into the very fabric of Egyptian society and that they must co-exist. That means compromise. And compromise is the beginning of pluralistic multi-party politics.

Turbulent Times and a difficult passage ahead:

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But if these six factors are promising elements that can be activated to build Egypt's New Republic, they are not likely to bear fruit except in the medium term, say 3-5 years. In the present period, from now to the three years, we have a very turbulent ride ahead. Turbulence that could easily lead to destabilizing the whole process and having Egypt regress into an autocratic State, be it of a secular or religious orientation. Optimists (like me) would say that we have a very good chance of surviving these turbulent three years, pessimists would tend towards the opposite point of view.

The turbulence of these three years will come from at least three separate factors:

First: the banging together of the two sides of divided Egypt until they conclude that they must co-exist, and must learn to compromise.

Second: the enormous economic crisis which faces the country and the difficult measures required to cope with it. This is not to be underestimated even as the political issues dominate both the news and the attention of people. Inevitably difficult economic reforms tend to cause social and political unrest.

Third: The absence of a genuine culture of democracy, one that recognizes that democracy requires pluralism and pluralism requires disagreement. That such disagreement and divergence in views is healthy and is the basis for democratic debate about public policy. A culture of democracy that recognizes that democracy is not about who is in majority but very much it is the protection of the minority from the tyranny of the majority. That was Madison's fundamental insight in his conception of the federal constitution at the birth of the American republic. After all, every single issue we take for granted today was once a minority position, even considered seditious in its day: from the limitations on the prerogatives of the monarch to the right of the people to elect their own government; from the equality of all citizens before the law to the rights of peoples to self-determination, and so on.

Egypt today is at a very serious juncture in its history. We will overcome the turbulence of these coming three years and hence fructify the latent potential of the six factors I mentioned, and move on to build a vibrant and effective democracy, or we will lapse into a return to authoritarianism. I tend to be an optimist. I believe that we shall overcome current obstacles, transcend the current highly charged emotions, and move on to a future full of promise. The Egyptian people have shown more than once, through their massive displays of people power in the streets, that they shall not accept autocracy. We can bend the future to the pattern of our dreams. [IDN-InDepthNews – September 9, 2013] □

MIDDLE EAST DOSSIER

Israeli Policy Bleeding Palestinian Economy

By Jaya Ramachandran



Bank of Palestine, Ramallah | Credit: Wikimedia Commons

GENEVA - Though at pains not to transgress political correctness, a new UN report unveils the highhandedness characterising Israeli economic policies towards the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), which are denting the authority of the Palestinian government.

Israel is not only depriving the OPT of about US\$300 million every year but also buttressing Palestinian dependence on Israel, and gravely undermining its competitiveness by refusing to transfer to the Palestinian treasury revenues from taxes on direct and indirect imports and on smuggled goods into the OPT from or via Israel, says a new report by UNCTAD.

According to the Protocol on Economic Relations, also known as Paris Protocol, signed in 1994 by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, leaked revenue from taxes on direct and indirect imports is supposed to be transferred to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

The report says that unpaid taxes on smuggled goods arriving from Israel represented some 17 per cent of total Palestinian tax revenues, or about \$305 million in 2012. These would have gone a long way to cover 18 per cent of the PA wage bill. "If this 'leakage' could be curtailed, and the money transferred from the Israeli treasury to the Palestinian treasury, the resulting increase in revenue would give the

PA greater fiscal policy space and help to expand economic growth and employment. The gross domestic product of the OPT would increase by 4 per cent, and employment would increase by 10,000 jobs per year," the report contends.

Multiple revenue leakage sources

The report stresses, however, that this fiscal loss is from one source only and does not include the revenue leakages from many other sources. These include taxes levied by Israel on incomes of Palestinians working in Israel and settlements. Also the use of the Israeli currency (shekel) in the OPT harms revenues.

Israel is also making the PA suffer the revenue loss by under-pricing imported goods in invoices, taking advantage of the fact that there is lack of Palestinian control over borders and obstacles in accessing proper trade data. Also because of lack of control over land and natural resources, the Palestinian Authority is losing revenues. Then there is the financial resources loss related to goods and services imported

through the Palestinian public sector (petroleum, energy, and water), and fiscal loss as a result of the smaller tax base caused by the decimation of the productive base and loss of natural resources to occupation.

The UNCTAD report estimates that 39 per cent of Palestinian imports from Israel originate in third countries, cleared as Israeli imports before being sold in the OPT as if they had been produced in Israel. Customs revenue from these "indirect imports" is collected by the Israeli authorities but not transferred to the PA.

Smuggling is another source of significant fiscal revenue loss. Where the smuggled goods are produced in Israel, the PA loses value-added tax (VAT) and purchase tax revenue. However, where goods are produced in a third country, tariff revenue is also leaked along with VAT and purchase tax revenue. "The value of goods smuggled from Israel into the OPT is hard to estimate, but may make up from 25 to 35 per cent of the OPT's total imports," says the report.

Remedies

The UNCTAD report suggests ways to reduce fiscal resource leakage. These include changes to the Paris Protocol, so that it is a more balanced framework "consistent with Palestinian sovereignty needs for economic, fiscal and policy independence."

The report also pleads for the PA being given full access to all data related to imports from or via Israel when the final destination of goods is the OPT. Also existing time restrictions, which currently prevent the PA from claiming due revenue, should be abolished, and Palestinian dependency on Israel ended by removing barriers to trade with countries other than Israel.

Palestinian custom brokers should be allowed access to Israeli ports and crossing points so that they can monitor customs procedures and the PA should be provided with financial and human resources needed to strengthen its customs administration capacity, says the report.

Constraints

The UNCTAD report points out that economic growth in the occupied territory came to 6 per cent in 2012, down from double digits the previous two years. While the restrictions on both the supply and demand sides of the economy continue to accumulate, aggregate demand is inhibited by the fiscal crisis, lower aid flows, and the private sector's inability to invest and generate employment.

At the same time, the supply side is depressed by the blockade on Gaza, mobility restrictions, the construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank, and by the isolation of

the entire economy from regional and international markets. The resulting high production costs cripple competitiveness, says the report.

In previous years, donor support concealed the impact of the measures imposed by the occupation. However, with the decline of such support and the subsequent fiscal crisis, the severe impact of the occupation on the Palestinian people and their economy are becoming clearer, the study says.

The economic impact was most pronounced in Gaza, where growth fell from 21 per cent in 2011 to 6.6 percent in 2012. The decline is concentrated in Gaza's agricultural and fishing sector, which has been directly affected by the Israeli military operation in Gaza in November 2012.

Unemployment in the OPT increased by 1 per cent to reach 27 per cent in 2012, the report says. Among youth, the jobless rate is roughly 50 per cent. Real wages, labour productivity, and labour participation rates all declined in 2012.

The poverty rate in the OPT in 2011 was 26 per cent – 18 per cent in the West Bank and 30 per cent in Gaza. Social assistance from the PA kept the rate from being 18 per cent higher, the study contends, but a fall in donor support in 2012 undercut the PA's ability to apply fiscal stimulus measures.

The PA increasingly has accumulated arrears to domestic banks, and loans owed to such institutions now represent 68 per cent of the Authority's revenues. The territory's human resources are severely impacted by Israeli closures, which hinder workers' abilities to find jobs, reduce school attendance, and create pressures that lead to child labour, the report contends.

The report notes that since 1967, Israel has established about 150 settlements in the OPT, including East Jerusalem. In addition, an estimated 540 internal checkpoints, roadblocks, and other physical obstacles continue to impede Palestinian movement in the OPT, separating Palestinian communities from international and local markets.

As a result, Palestinian products lose competitiveness in local and international markets, and economic growth in the OPT leans more and more towards the services sector, with a decline in agriculture and manufacturing.

Israeli restrictions on the movement of people and goods in and around the OPT make Palestinian trade heavily dependent on the Israeli economy. This reinforces Palestinian dependence on Israel and is the major factor behind the chronic Palestinian trade deficit, which grew in 2012 from 44 per cent to 47 per cent of gross domestic product, the report says. [IDN-InDepthNews – September 13, 2013]

The UNCTAD report points out that economic growth in the occupied territory came to 6 per cent in 2012, down from double digits the previous two years. While the restrictions on both the supply and demand sides of the economy continue to accumulate, aggregate demand is inhibited by the fiscal crisis, lower aid flows, and the private sector's inability to invest and generate employment.

ASIA-PACIFIC

China Restraining Small Arms Exports

By Richard Johnson

STOCKHOLM – “China has been actively involved in three important processes during 2013 to prevent trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and promote greater transparency in international transfers of SALW,” says Tilman Brück, Director of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

A significant process was that China played an active role in the negotiation of the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and accepted the inclusion of SALW in the treaty’s scope. Then, in September China voted in favour of the first United Nations Security Council resolution to focus exclusively on the problems associated with the illicit trade in SALW.

In contrast, however, the Chinese expert in the UN Group of Governmental Experts reviewing the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA) opposed the inclusion of a new category for SALW in the register. “Interpreting these positions is made more challenging by the opacity of China’s system for controlling SALW exports and preventing trafficking and the lack of data on the size and destinations of Chinese SALW exports,” notes Brück.

Against this backdrop, the SIPRI study titled ‘China’s Exports of Small Arms and Light Weapons’ represents an important contribution to increasing understanding of Chinese approaches to controlling SALW exports and to mapping the recipients of Chinese SALW.

The authors of the study – Mark Bromley, Mathieu Duchâtel and Paul Holtom – have built on their expertise in the international arms trade and Chinese foreign policy to provide new insights in these areas. And, their work provides a solid basis not only for further research on Chinese arms exports but also to enable greater engagement with Chinese counterparts to prevent illicit and destabilizing transfers of SALW and ammunition.

Small arms and light weapons, according to the UN Panel of Governmental Experts, are ‘those weapons designed for personal use’, and light weapons are ‘those designed for use by several persons serving as a crew’.

The study points out that China has long been one of the world’s most significant exporters of small arms and light weapons. It is also among the least transparent. At the same time, China has stated its commitment to preventing the illicit trade in SALW and formally recognizes the destabilizing effect that SALW transfers can have on peace and security, economic development and social stability.

China’s development of improved transfer control systems has been driven by both domestic and international concerns, states the study. While initially reluctant to fully engage at the United Nations level, China has increasingly accepted the validity of reaching agreement on instruments to help tackle the illicit trade in SALW and to control SALW transfers.

“China’s engagement with the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (POA) is particularly important in this regard. China has provided important information on Chinese SALW transfer controls in its reports on POA implementation. Nevertheless, there are still gaps in China’s reports,” says the study.

Unenthusiastic

It adds: China is unenthusiastic about creating an eighth category for SALW in the UN Register of Conventional Arms and has never responded to the invitation to submit information on SALW transfers. In fact China dropped its opposition to the inclusion of SALW in the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty after receiving assurances that its red lines in other areas would be respected.

The study notes that Beijing’s view on the imposition of UN arms embargoes is shaped by its wider views on non-interference in the internal affairs of states and the primacy of national sovereignty. Subsequently, China has a mixed record in its interactions with arms embargo reporting mechanisms.

According to the study, at the end of the 1990s and in early 2000s, China established a comprehensive system to control the export of conventional arms, including SALW. Arms exports are handled as an administrative matter. The cornerstone of the transfer control system for conventional arms is the 2002 Regulations on the Administration of Arms Exports.

The regulations contain information on arms trading companies and licencing and a control list. There are currently 11 state-owned enterprises (SOE) authorized to trade in conventional arms, of which four are authorized to export SALW and another two are authorized to export man-portable air defence system (MANPADS). The Chinese Government has reportedly examined the idea of authorizing private companies to apply for export licenses, but this idea never gained prominence, says the study.

The system grants the state and the military strong centralized control over arms exports to prevent illicit and destabilizing transfers. During the licence-issuing process, export control authorities examine whether the requested transfer is conducive to the self-defence capability of the recipient country, its impact on regional and world peace, stability and security, and whether it could interfere with the recipient country’s internal affairs.

Limited information

According to the authors of the study, China exports all types of new and surplus SALW, but does not provide public information on either SALW export authorizations or deliveries. A combination of security, political and economic drivers motivate China’s exports.

“China is a supplier of SALW to states that struggle to gain access to supplies from a number of other major SALW producers and exporters and also benefits from the fact that many states are seeking to diversify sources of supply. It is clear that China is an important supplier of SALW to states in the developing world, and fragile and conflict-affected states in particular,” states the study.

According to the SIPRI report, at least 46 states imported military SALW from China during 2006-2010, with African states accounting for the largest share of such imports. “A number of exports of Chinese SALW to Africa that have involved European arms brokers have caused concern with regard to their potential impacts on peace, stability and security in the importing state,” the study says.

Several states in Asia have also reported importing SALW from China, with Pakistan and Bangladesh the most prominent recipients, both of direct deliveries as well as licenced production arrangements and technology transfers.

Besides, there has been an increase in the quantity and quality of weapons supplied by China to Latin America in recent years. In the Middle East, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Qatar imported SALW from China in the period 2006-2010. Iran has been a major recipient of Chinese arms, including SALW, since the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War.

“But in response to concerns that Iran is an important point of diversion of arms and technology to armed non-state actors and the illicit market, China is reported to have wound down arms sales to Iran,” according to the study.

Non-state actors

It adds: There is significant evidence to indicate that armed non-state actors in South and South East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Middle East are using SALW produced in China. These SALW may have been stolen from government stocks or seized from government forces on the battlefield. However, in many cases it appears that states have imported weapons from China and then re-transferred them to armed non-state actors.

The authors of the study are of the view that there is potential for greater sharing with China of other states’ experiences, policies and practices with regards to assessments of the risk of diversion, including unauthorized re-exports.

“Building on Chinese interest in developing and implementing robust controls on SALW exports, and given that there have been a number of cases of Chinese SALW exports being re-exported without authorization, it could be desirable for states participating in the Wassenaar Arrangement to consider conducting outreach to China on its Best Practice Guidelines on Subsequent Transfer (Re-export) Controls for Conventional Weapons Systems,” authors of the study say.

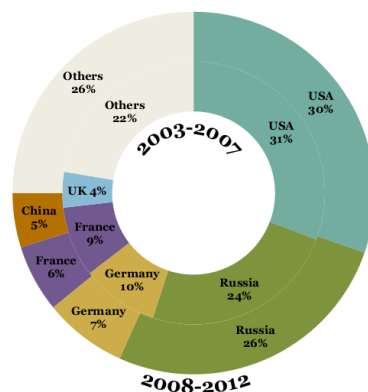
“States could also share their own experiences and practices in dealing with cases of unauthorized re-export and in strengthening risk assessment and post-shipment and delivery measures in this area,” they add.

[IDN-InDepthNews – October 14, 2013] □



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ASIA-PACIFIC

Behind Crackdown on China's Bo Xilai

By Shastri Ramachandaran*



Photo: Bo Xilai | Credit: Wikimedia Commons

NEW DELHI - The abounding speculation over whether bribery, graft and abuse of power were the only reasons for China's former Politburo member Bo Xilai being sentenced (on September 22) to life and stripped of his political rights and property for life is, perhaps, unlikely to be answered with any certitude for a long time. What is certain though is that, for now, the political phenomenon that was Bo Xilai is dead. So is his brand of mass politics.

Arriving in Jinan, capital of China's northeastern province of Shandong, a day after the Intermediate People's Court in the city handed him a life term, I found people going about their business as usual. Nothing appeared amiss in the city: the extra security at the airport could have been for any of several other reasons.

There was no buzz about the sensational case, the like of which China has not witnessed in 30 years. To quote a phrase from another time and place, "not a dog barked" in Jinan, Beijing or Chongqin when Bo went down at the end of a well-choreographed trial that met every expectation of form.

Few would deny that Bo was guilty of corruption, and of abuse of power. Even so, it is difficult to accept that Bo's case is related only to "corruption" and "abuse of power", as

made out by the party, government, media and the court in China. Politicians in office have got away with worse for "reasons of State", and not only in China but also in other countries including India and the U.S., both democracies enjoying judicial independence.

Therefore, it would be a wilful rejection of reality to ignore the political significance of the trial given the pedigree of the now-disgraced 'Princeling' Bo, his family connections, charisma, his unprecedented rise to stardom, new politics and mass appeal.

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Above all, in the months preceding the decadal change in political leadership, there was wide expectation that Bo would become a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, the supreme decision-making body of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

Therefore, the trial consigning Bo to political oblivion, cannot be delinked from his politics, his rise to prominence, his neo-Maoist mass line and his own ruthless crackdown on corruption, crime and gangsterism in Chongqing, to make the populous city of 31 million safe for its inhabitants when he lorded over it.

Celebratory aplomb

As the party chief of Chongqing, he was a hardliner. An economic conservative but a political populist, he stood for reforms – for moving politics and social policies back to the Left – far from the free market values rampant in today's China.

He was heavy-handed in his fight against crime syndicates, which earned him powerful enemies; he was no less driven in pushing for welfare-based politics and policies, which won him a following far beyond Chongqing.

The emergence of Bo as a political phenomenon was cause for both celebration (among the people) and much discomfiture (for the establishment). I recall his arriving in Beijing for the National People's Congress and CPC Central Committee sessions in March 2010.

He was greeted with such celebratory aplomb that even the stodgy official English daily, in a report headlined, "Chongqing chief gets star treatment", gushed: "The charismatic leader of China's largest municipality found himself at center stage on Saturday surrounded by close to 200 cheering reporters at the Great Hall of the People."

At that time, more than one observer in Beijing told me that this could spell trouble for Bo – "It cannot be to the liking of those who expect to be at the helm soon". And so it has proved.

That points to the first impact of Bo on the CPC and China's political culture: The need for the new leadership to finish him and his political career, and make sure that he is neither seen nor heard. Otherwise, as widely expected, he would have got a lighter sentence; with hope of "rehabilitation", as

had happened with his father and others, including President Xi Jinping's father. Now, Bo would be behind bars for more than the 10 years that Xi may be President.

The second effect was the court proceedings going public, through microblogs – unheard of in China. While this may have been intended to convince the world that Bo's trial was fair, it was also to make an example of Bo to the audience at large. Equally, it was to stress President Xi's point about "cracking down at the same time on tigers and flies" – meaning no one, ever so high, would be spared in the anti-corruption crusade. Had the case been tried in-camera, the very purpose of banishing from the political stage would have been defeated.

The third "Bo effect" occurred when he was sacked from the Party's 25-member Central Committee in early 2012: He brought unforeseen Internet freedom to China. What President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Google together failed to achieve after a protracted campaign was accomplished by Bo.

Within weeks of his dismissal from office, Bo, as an issue, exploded on the Internet unlike anything before. The Chinese found ways to beat the censors and the Net was teeming with blogs and microblogs. This short-lived media and Internet revolution set the tone for his trial being made public via blogs.

The fourth presumed impact of Bo, or rather the mass politics he represented, is President Xi harping on the need for the Party to adopt "a mass line". The mass line – reaching the masses fighting crime and corruption and upholding rule of law – was central to Bo's campaign. Yet, few in China would make bold to point out Xi's campaign theme as being "Bo-ism without Bo". In the prevalent situation, it would be impolitic if not politically suicidal to do so. That may explain Bo's prominent supporters and commonplace followers choosing, for now at least, to lie low. Whether and when they will re-emerge from the woodwork is a moot point.

The CPC's Central Committee Plenum to be held in November may provide indications of the long-term effects of this case. It would be premature to speculate whether Bo's exit marks the end of this round of power play or the beginning of another to put away 'errant heavyweights'.

[IDN-InDepthNews – October 19, 2013] □



Mao Zedong proclaiming the establishment of the PRC in 1949

ASIA-PACIFIC

Sri Lanka: UN's Navi Pillay Fails To Dispel Charges Of Bias

By Kalinga Seneviratne

SINGAPORE - Giving a press conference at the end of seven-day visit to Sri Lanka, United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) head Navi Pillay, a South African, said that she was highly offended by comments in the Sri Lankan media accusing her of bias because of her Indian Tamil ethnicity.

“Some media, ministers, bloggers and various propagandists in Sri Lanka have, for several years now, on the basis of my Indian Tamil heritage, described me as a tool of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). They have claimed I was in their pay, the ‘Tamil Tigress in the UN’. This is not only wildly incorrect, it is deeply offensive,” said Pillay at the beginning of the press conference on August 31, 2013.

In the same vein, she added, “the LTTE was a murderous organization that committed numerous crimes and destroyed many lives . . . those in the diaspora who continue to revere the memory of the LTTE must recognize that there should be no place for the glorification of such a ruthless organization”.

These comments have not stopped the Sri Lankan media and the blogosphere continuing their attacks on the perceived bias of both UNHRC and its head for allegedly overstepping her mandate to attack the Sri Lankan government from its own soil.

In a hard-hitting editorial, the government-owned Daily News the day after she left Sri Lanka, said that “the UN High Commissioner’s prejudices have long been clear, but they have never been clearer than after her recent visit to this country”.

The editorial went on to argue that the reaction at the end of her tour was expected and in fact, President Mahinda Rajapakse himself predicted it the day before. “He told her at Temple Trees (President’s official residence) that the people of this country think that her report to the UN at the end of her tour of duty will reflect her prejudice,” the paper disclosed.

Welcoming her comments on the ruthlessness of the LTTE, the Daily News said: “We may very well be able take her at her word that she has no truck with the Tamil Tigers, but if anybody on the streets gets that impression she has only herself to blame for it.” It pointed out that without informing the government in advance she had tried to lay a wreath in Nandikadal, the location of the final battle in which the LTTE was annihilated. The army officials on the location stopped her from doing it.



During her meeting with President Rajaakse, Pillay was reported to have told him that it was good she was able to come to see the developments in the country and it was “very visible” to her that the government has invested a lot in reconstruction work in the North.

Yet, the pro-LTTE TamilNet said that according to informed sources in Jaffna when the Northern Province Governor Major General (retd) G.A. Chandrasiri was showcasing the development work in the area, she told him that she was more interested in witnessing what had been achieved

on the human rights front. She also questioned whether the people on the ground had been consulted in designing the ‘development’ projects that were being displayed to her.

'Double standards'

In addition to her perceived ethnic Tamil bias, a lot of criticism in the Sri Lankan media and websites has focused on what are considered as her double standards in demanding an independent war crimes investigation on the final days of the war against the LTTE in Sri Lanka, while being silent on U.S. and NATO actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and currently in Syria.

Writing in LankaWeb, veteran journalist M.L.D Mahindapala argued that Pillay has worked hand in glove with the European Union to accuse Sri Lanka of war crimes. “As early as May 2009 she has fired a broadside with regards to human rights violation which ran on parallel lines to the EU resolution tabled at UNHRC,” he pointed out.

“On what criteria did she confine her condemnation of Sri Lanka to the last five months of war, leaving out selectively 32 years and 7 months of the longest war in Asia in which the Tamil Tiger terrorists used every conceivable weapons of war, including chemical warfare?” asked Mahindapala.

The independent Island newspaper reported that the Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapakse has told Pillay that the United States had no moral right to move a resolution targeting Sri Lanka at the UNHRC. He has questioned her silence and argued that it reflected the difficulties experienced by the UNHRC in dealing with atrocities committed by U.S.-led Western powers.

When Pillay was asked this question at the press conference, she merely said that UNHRC release a report on every country each year and last year the U.S. had to respond to 19 queries. But, she avoided saying anything more about these queries or why she has not articulated it publicly as she has done with Sri Lanka.

“The bottom line was that Mrs Pillay would remain as UN rights chief as long as she didn’t antagonise the U.S.,” Defense Secretary told the Island.

Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister Prof G.L Peiris has reiterated during a meeting with Pillay in Colombo that it is important to have an objective approach and extend equal treatment to all countries when fulfilling the assigned mandate of the UNHRC. The Minister added that Sri Lanka accepts constructive and justified criticism, but resents vicious and baseless positions, which are incessantly repeated.

He had explained to her the difficulties encountered in identifying the perpetrators of human rights violations due to the conditions prevailing at the time of incidence, with regard to a number of cases UNHRC has raised that occurred during the war. He drew a parallel with the case of the assassination of the former Foreign Minister late Lakshman Kadirgamar (by the LTTE), where conviction has not been possible due to the lack of evidence. In cases of missing persons, he outlined the difficulties in identifying the missing due to instances involving persons having migrated to other countries holding multiple identities, and those host governments not divulging their details.

It was indicated to UNHRC head that the repeated use of baseless and arbitrary figures in respect of disappearances, eventually lends authenticity in the face of the massive propaganda that is being carried out against the Government of Sri Lanka. Regarding comments made by the High Commissioner on the PTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act), the Minister stated that some of the countries that criticize, have provisions in their domestic legislation far beyond those of the Sri Lankan PTA.

He advised Pillay to look at the human rights situation in Sri Lanka from a more broader perspective and pointed out the

impressive development indicators in the country since the war ended in 2009. He gave her information on the enormous amount of resources being channeled to the North, which has resulted in a 27% growth rate in that region, as against corresponding national figure of 7%. In this context, Minister had also informed her that there are 225 bank branches and 76 finance and leasing companies that have been established in the Northern Province since 2009.

Pillay is due to make a report to the next UNHRC sessions in October on Sri Lanka, but, many commentators in Colombo tend to believe that it will not be fair to the country.

Cautioned on ethnic bias

However, political columnist D.B.S Jeyaraj of the Daily Mirror newspaper has warned against using the “ethnic bias” argument to discredit Navi Pillay’s report. “The proponents of this ethnic bias argument are in effect playing into the hands of those seeking an impartial international investigation into charges against Sri Lanka,” he argues.

“The line pursued by those who desire an international investigation into alleged war crimes during the final phase of the war against the LTTE is that Sri Lanka would not be able to conduct an impartial investigation into those matters because of the ethnic factor. The predominantly Sinhala Govt. would not conduct a free and unfettered probe into allegations against the predominantly Sinhala armed forces is the crux of the argument,” notes Jeyaraj.

“Colombo however, invokes the concept of sovereignty and counters such demands by saying that Sri Lanka as a nation is above ethnic considerations and is capable of conducting an impartial probe,” he adds.

“What the denigrators of Navi Pillay on grounds of ethnicity fail to take note of is that their campaign against the UN High Commissioner is strengthening the hand of those seeking an international investigation into Sri Lankan affairs,” he warns. “If Navi Pillay is deemed unsuitable because of alleged partiality due to ethnicity then the same argument would be applicable to Colombo too,” he adds.

[IDN-InDepthNews – September 5, 2013] □



The old Sri Lankan parliament building, near the Galle Face Green.
It now serves as the Presidential Secretariat’s headquarters.

ASIA-PACIFIC

Revived Nalanda Should Include Buddhists

By Shenali D Waduge*



The remnants of the library of Nalanda University which is reported to have burned for three months after the invaders set fire to it, ransacked and destroyed the monasteries, and drove the monks from the site.

COLOMBO - In 1193 A.D. Nalanda, the world's oldest Buddhist university was ransacked and destroyed by foreign invaders led by the Turkish Bakhityar Khiliji because the 14 acre "giver of knowledge" was a strong pillar of Buddhism and attracted students from all over the world, including countries such as Turkey and Persia. The invaders burnt to ruins the magnificent library and other architectural masterpieces of the Nalanda University.

In 2006, it was announced that Nalanda University was to be revived with the efforts and contributions of numerous countries. However, the issue is that old Nalanda was essentially a Buddhist place of learning promoting Buddhist beliefs and philosophy – the new architects are ironing out a creation of ancient Nalanda with a modern twist to include subjects that are taught in general universities thereby denying the Buddhist niche that Nalanda epitomized .

The Buddhist leaders and the Buddhist world need to make clear that if Nalanda is to be revived it must remain a Buddhist university both in its aims and objectives, promoting Buddhist idealism and not be turned into a secular one.

Nalanda must remain true to its origins, attached to its moorings, and reflect its unique heritage and the set of beliefs it fostered for over 700 years until it was brought down through death and destruction by invading Islamic armies that had no respect for the others' beliefs and the institutions that sustained and promoted such beliefs through study and learning.

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It would be outrageous if this new initiative of a group of people led by Amartya Sen, a Professor at Harvard University, were to achieve what the iconoclasts could not do; erase old Nalanda from public memory that is still kept alive by the well preserved ruins of that outstanding Buddhist University.

Why cultural heritage is important

Cultural heritage is the legacy of tangible culture (buildings, monuments, books, landscape, works of art and artefacts), intangible culture (traditions, language, knowledge, folklore) and natural heritage (biodiversity and culturally significant landscapes) belonging to a group that they inherited from past generations, to be maintained in the present for the benefit of future generations.

Preservation and Conservation become two important attributes towards ensuring that cultural heritage is unique and irreplaceable. This is why UNESCO has declared 936 World Heritage Sites, 725 cultural, 183 natural, 28 mixed properties in 153 countries.

In modern times where structural engineering cannot match the marvels of histories past, what needs to be reiterated is that cultures that left legacies for present generations to feel proud of their ancestors should not be despised or subtly desecrated because a handful of other cultures did not leave such legacies. Therefore, liberals and secularists and those who believe in iconoclasm should not use their positions to dilute the pride that cultures and heritage sites continue to provide and Nalanda is just one case in point.

Sacrilege

It would be totally out of context and tantamount to religious sacrilege to declare the revival of a Buddhist institution where it was a seat of Buddhist learning for over a period of 700 years with 2000 Buddhist teachers and 10,000 students, medium of learning was in Sanskrit, as a modern secular university to satisfy some Asian's thirst to set up modern institutions in the East to rival those in the West.

The curriculum of the ancient Nalanda University covered different forms of Buddhism including Theravada and Mahayana, Buddhist law, Buddhist politics, Theravada administration, astronomy etc. While the promoters of the project say that ancient knowledge systems would be revived, but in the same breadth say that important subjects relevant to

Asian integration would be taught at the new Nalanda without allocating a special place to Buddhist studies and Buddhist ideals.

Hieun Tsang, a Chinese scholar who spent many years at the ancient Nalanda University, said that 100 lectures were delivered daily. It was referred to as "international" because the Buddhist students came, among other countries, from China, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet, Myanmar, and Mongolia.

The three libraries at Nalanda (Ratna-Sagara, Ratna-Nidi and Ratna-Ranjana) were nine storeys high. Foreign invaders under Bhaktiar Khilji not only massacred the Buddhist monks and Buddhist students but also burnt the books in the library. It is said that the books continued to burn over a considerable length of time with the sky turning black due to the smoke.

If the project aims at reviving "Buddhist values and philosophy, which have become an integral part of East Asian civilization" it cannot leave out Buddhist participation, particularly if the goal is to "develop Nalanda as an icon of the Asian renaissance attracting scholars and students from a much wider region as the ancient university once did".

Thus we question how the Nalanda Mentor Group can be headed by a Bengali Hindu (Prof. Amartya Sen) and include three Indian scholars all based in the West devoid of any leading Buddhist scholars based in Asia in order to carry Nalanda's intellectual flame of tradition? That tradition cannot lead to creating replicas of foreign universities using the Nalanda name. The politicization of Nalanda is obvious with donors attempting to use Nalanda for geo-political benefit.

While being grateful to the donations from various foreign Governments to revive the world's most ancient university, what needs to be reiterated is that it should not be turned into simply a secular international university totally suppressing its Buddhist cultural identity. We like to see committed Buddhists leading dedicated Buddhist Universities.

Buddhism is not a showboat religion. It is still very much a living religion and its practices and institutions must be preserved and respected accordingly. Business ventures are important but not to the extent of transforming a highly venerated historic Buddhist educational institution into something else that will hardly have any Buddhist colouring. This should be simply unacceptable to the Buddhists of the world. [IDN-InDepthNews - August 16, 2013] □



The seal of Nalanda University set in terracotta on display in the ASI Museum in Nalanda

ASIA-PACIFIC

Political Reform Essential in Japan

By Frances McCall Rosenbluth*

NEW HAVEN - The Liberal Democratic Party's landslide victory in Japan's House of Councillors elections on July 21 was good news for the Japanese economy – the third largest in the world. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's Keynesian spending policies are exactly what's needed to pull the country out of the prolonged economic malaise that has lasted, shockingly, for more than two decades since Japan's asset bubble burst in 1991.

With solid majorities in both houses of parliament, Abe is in a strong position to get on with the task of economic rebuilding that could also benefit the world. But given the fundamental weakness of Japan's fractured political system, the moment could turn out to be ephemeral.

A landslide win seems like a healthy development. After all, "tossing the bums out" is the essence of democratic politics – denied to Japan for decades before the 1994 electoral reforms broke the back of the LDP's hegemony.

Prior to 1994, the LDP manipulated the old multi-member district system to lock in voter loyalty with protectionist policies and personal favors. Now the 480-member House of Representatives has 300 single member districts in which the party with the most appealing platform wins the most votes.

In a historic pair of LDP-repudiating elections for the Upper House in 2007 and the Lower House in 2009, Japanese voters turned over the reins to center-left Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), ending the LDP's virtually unbroken control of postwar Japan. Now Abe is back, full of vim and vigor, with the wind at his back. Voters may have changed their minds once again to favor the LDP, but that does not mean Japan is destined to be a one-party state. Many of Japan's central bureaucrats are happy to have old masters back in the saddle. The LDP has for years had an enormous organizational advantage, and local politicians, who supply the pipeline for national candidates, will once again flock to the LDP on account of its control of the national legislature.



Thin margin

Still, Japanese voters have not swung as far to the right as it might seem. The electoral margin in this election was surprisingly thin – LDP won only 35 percent of the vote in the proportional representation portion of the ballot – on a turnout of 53 percent of eligible voters. In the Lower House elections of December 2012, the LDP clawed back a legislative majority with 43 percent of the single member district votes, 28 percent of the proportional representation votes, and an alliance with a smaller party, the Komeito.

Upon resuming the prime minister post, Abe lost no time turning on the fiscal spigots, so-called Abenomics, which has improved the domestic mood and gained him star-status in world opinion. The DPJ had instead wrung its collective hands about the national debt which is twice the size of Japan's GDP, a ratio of debt-to-GDP that is roughly double the American and higher than Greece's. Lacking the necessary legislative majority in both chambers, the DPJ had tried but failed to work out long-term tax plans to cover

the rising costs of services consumed by Japan's aging population.

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Image: Credit: yaleglobal.yale.edu

Unless voters are vigilant, however, what is good for Japan's economy in the short run may be harmful in the long run. LDP's solid majority puts Abe one step closer towards his goal of abolishing Article IX of the "peace constitution" that renounces the right to wage war.

Against the backdrop of heightening tension with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, Abe has renewed the call for a revision of the constitution. For Japan's neighbors who were victims of aggression in World War II, this would be unwelcome. Although the current constitution has not stopped Japan from building the fifth largest military in the world, Abe's tough stand on China stokes fears among Japanese voters that they are a nation in decline. The rhetoric could atrophy into the worst kind of jingoism.

Shortfalls

But global concern about resurgent nationalism or one-party rule in Japan misses a deeper concern. Japan still lacks clear electoral accountability. Although Japan's electoral reforms of 1994 improved accountability by creating more incentives to form large, encompassing parties that could campaign on policy rather than on retail favors and popularity, the reforms did not go far enough.

Of the 480-member House of Representatives, 180 are chosen from proportional representation lists which create many small parties purveying an array of confusing messages to voters. The House of Councillors is even worse, with a combination of proportional representation lists and the corruption-inducing multi-member district system that the Lower House eliminated in 1994.

Voters may like the intensity and focus of small parties – there are more than 10 in the Upper House alone – but they cannot be held accountable for national policies because they cannot themselves form a majority and may swing one way or another to become part of a governing coalition.

Small parties have the luxury of picking a favorite issue, such as low taxes, while ignoring the costs of a shortfall in the government budget with which to provide services that voters also expect to enjoy. As long as proportional representation offers the possibility of winning seats in parliament with the support of relatively few voters, politicians have far less reason to join one of the two big parties that can provide competing visions of what is best for the whole nation.

In the election, Japan's voters said "yes" to promises of economic growth and "no" to the DPJ's failure to achieve it. The problem is that the promises are hollow and Japan lacks the political system that enables political parties to take responsible decisions. Abe's popularity will remain high until the time comes to pay for deficit spending or until urban voters balk at subsidies for farmers or until farmers try to block free trade agreements that reduce the grocery bill for the average citizen. Any number of policy decisions will bring his demise, and Japanese voters will see with dismay that once again the Japanese parliament is too fragmented to make tough decisions.

Meanwhile, Japanese politicians will reach for cheap votes, promising something for nothing and stoking jingoistic fears of foreign policy encirclement.

The time has come for Japan to eliminate proportional representation from its ballots. A two-party system will foster political competition at the level of big ideas and wholesale policies rather than narrow, single-issue politics that trap legislatures in an endless blame game. It was once said, in the heady days of Japan's "economic miracle," that Japan had a first-rate economy and a third-rate political system. What has become clear over the decades is that a strong economy is not possible without fixing the politics. A responsible party system in Japan will not only make for a better Japan but also for happier neighbors and a safer world.

[IDN-InDepthNews – July 31, 2013] □

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The Golden Hall and five-storey pagoda of Hōryū-ji, among the oldest wooden buildings in the world, National Treasures, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site

LATIN AMERICA

Anti-US Rhetoric Does Not Overshadow Trade

By Luisa Parraguez, Francisco Garcia Gonzalez, Joskua Tadeo*

MEXICO CITY - The Latin American blogosphere held its breath when Bolivian president Evo Morales's plane was forced to land in Vienna in July. As European authorities searched for former U.S. National Security Agency contract worker Edward Snowden on board, Twitter accounts of South American presidents exploded with resentment.

The continent denounced the United States for extending its hemispheric supremacy to Europe, sputtered words like “colonialism” and “imperialism,” and claimed that the incident violated the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Argentina's President Cristina Kirchner called the incident “not only humiliating to a sister nation, but also for the whole South American continent.”

Fury continues with reports that the NSA allegedly hacked web accounts of Brazil's state-owned oil company – described as “industrial espionage” by President Dilma Rousseff – and monitored internet and phone communications of Rousseff and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto while he was a candidate. Rousseff postponed a state visit to Washington, pending investigation, and with President Barack Obama waiting in the wings of the UN General Assembly for his turn at the podium, she tore into the United States for its “breach of international law.”

This may be a turning point in U.S. relations with its southern neighbors. While anti-American sentiment on the street, a result of a long history of domination, is real, the bedrock reality is that the U.S. and Latin America are joined at the hip, economically and demographically. Trade, investment and immigration data reveal growing relations and interdependence.

Rousseff's suspending her trip to Washington is only the latest episode in a long history of turbulent relations with external powers. Simón Bolívar, the Liberator of the South,

Trading accusations: The Bolivian president's aircraft is forced to land and searched by Austrian police in the Vienna airport.



Brazilian President Rousseff with President Morales, united in denouncing the US

first proposed combatting European colonialism in South America in 1826. During the Cold War, the U.S. policy of containment led to military interventions in Central America and the Caribbean, and supported right-wing dictatorships in the Southern Cone. According to Amnesty International, hundreds of thousands were tortured, exiled or “disappeared” by U.S.-backed military juntas in Chile, Argentina and Guatemala.

The U.S. fear of communism spreading in the region was controlled through the Organization of American States. After the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, the Multidimensional Secretariat was established at the OAS to deal with transnational threats such as terrorism and organized crime. Hundreds of thousands more have lost their lives in Colombia, Mexico and Honduras with the rise of organized crime in the region.

Until his death in March 2013, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela spearheaded a group of eight nations under the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas, ALBA, in an anti-imperialist movement that carries the banner of 21st century socialism. ALBA, led by Cuba and Venezuela

against the Free Trade Area of the Americas headed by the United States, was born to counteract U.S. dominion in the region.

Soon after the NSA revelations began, leftwing governments in South America – Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela – made international headlines by offering asylum to Snowden. The whistleblower's plight is similar to that of WikiLeaks

founder, Julian Assange, who has taken refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London since June 2012. On July 20, less than a month after the beginning of the Snowden affair, Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro took the opportunity to end conversations that had begun in June with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, stating, "My policy is zero tolerance to gringo aggression against Venezuela." Talks to replace a U.S. ambassador in Caracas were abandoned yet again.

Trade vs ideology

In Latin America, ALBA countries act as an axis of anti-American sentiment. In February 2013, the Ecuadoran Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño called the OAS Inter-American Defense Board "useless," suggesting that it was merely another arm of U.S. influence in the region. A month later, Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa stated in the inaugural address of the 22nd Summit of ALBA that its members "must create a shield against exploitation, a shield against neocolonialism." ALBA nations have established their own School of Sovereignty and Defense in Bolivia to keep U.S. imperialist intervention at bay. A main security argument is that drug trafficking is a problem for the U.S. and not necessarily a policy issue for South American countries.

It would follow that the strong, constant flows of trade, aid and security cooperation between Latin America and the U.S. would dry up after so much tension. Nevertheless, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that trade remains stable for now, especially for oil producers like Venezuela and Bolivia. Anti-American sentiment in the region seems to be purely rhetorical, having little impact on trade relations with the United States.

Anti-American rhetoric in ALBA countries has not prevented them from listing the U.S. among their main trade partners. As of 2012, the U.S. was the main import source for Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Honduras. Particularly striking is that 31.2 percent of Venezuela's imports and 28 percent of Ecuador's come from the United States. Adding to this list, the U.S. is Bolivia's fourth largest source of imports, producing up to 10 percent of its imports, and Argentina's second source after Brazil.

Top trade partner

The United States receives the largest percentage of Latin American exports from Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Honduras. In the case of Bolivia, it drops to second place after Brazil. Such significant flows of merchandise and capital will not stop overnight, no matter how many countries forced the Bolivian presidential plane to land for a few hours.

Demographically and economically, the U.S. is changing in ways that make any standoff with Latin American partners unlikely. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's recent report on foreign investment in the region, the U.S. still accounts for 58.5 percent of foreign investment. At the same time, the 53 million people of Hispanic and Latino origin in the U.S. account for 17 percent of its population, making them the largest ethnic minority in the country. In much the same way, as reported by The New York Times, Latin American migration to the U.S. has reached equilibrium with new arrivals roughly equivalent to the number of people returning home. Americans are also picking countries as diverse as Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica and Nicaragua to retire, while recent trips to Mexico and Chile by the U.S. president and vice-president emphasize education exchanges.

South America expresses its outrage through diplomacy. Consider, after Morales was allowed to return to La Paz, the diplomatic rumble escalated as members of the regional trading institution Mercosur called back their ambassadors in the countries that had denied the Bolivian president use of airspace. Ecuador joined them four days later, at which point Venezuela also officially removed ambassadors in Spain, France, Portugal and Italy. An apology was issued July 25, and ambassadors from Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador were reinstated to their offices in Paris, Rome, Madrid and Lisbon two days later.

Concerns may run more deeply over reports of the United States monitoring communications of presidents and strategic industries. Brazil is the world's sixth largest economy, and Rousseff may use the embarrassing disclosures to leverage the United States on trade, internet regulation and other priorities. With the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics coming up, Brazil will most likely use the situation as much-needed political capital at home, instead of attempting any change in relations with the U.S. beyond venting at the UN. Rousseff cannot afford to risk an international snafu amidst growing discontent over her actions concerning domestic policy.

Trade overrides ideology. The bottom line, leftwing leaders like Maduro and Morales need U.S. business in their economies, and the most vehement anti-imperialist talk is overshadowed by economic pragmatism. Ecuador is in an even more critical position, as reliance on the U.S. dollar in its economy means it cannot afford poor relations with the United States. Ideological hot air may grab headlines, but will not trump Latin America's heavy flows of trade with the world's most powerful economy.

[IDN-InDepthNews – October 2, 2013] □

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PERSPECTIVES

Of Spooks and Whistleblowers

By Jayantha Dhanapala



KANDY, Sri Lanka - Suddenly, a cascade of leaks has been affecting the sole superpower in the world. First there was Pfc. Bradley Manning, the American who leaked 700,000 government files to WikiLeaks, and Julian Assange, an Australian and the founder of WikiLeaks. Then in May, Edward Snowden, at the time a United States intelligence analyst, fled with his cache of surveillance program secrets first to Hong Kong and on to Moscow.

Manning has been exonerated of the most serious charge of “aiding the enemy” but has been convicted on other charges and was recently sentenced to 35 years in prison. Assange languishes in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London while being a candidate in Australian Senate elections. The cumulative damage that all three have caused the security of the United States is incalculable, quite apart from exposing to American friends and allies that they have been the subject of cybersnooping or, to put it bluntly, espionage.

Equally important is the embarrassment these three players have caused the Obama administration by revealing to US citizens that, in an Orwellian scenario, they are under relentless scrutiny by their government in the name of being protection from terrorism.

Meanwhile, the argument will go on as to whether Manning and Snowden are conscientious objectors standing up for truth and transparency or plain traitors violating the oath of secrecy they took in their jobs. The excellent documentary directed by Alex Gibney, “We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks” portrays both Manning and Assange as being neither heroes nor villains but as citizens with honest convictions together with their complexes and frailties.

Indeed, Daniel Ellsberg, the Pentagon official who, in 1971, famously leaked the Pentagon Papers during the Vietnam War has said, “In my estimation, there has not been in American history a more important leak than Edward Snowden’s release of NSA material — and that includes the Pentagon Papers, for which I was responsible 40 years ago. Snowden’s

whistleblowing gives us the possibility to roll back what has amounted to an ‘executive coup’ against the US constitution.”

Democracies pride themselves on their adherence to human rights and none more so than the US. In the period after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, a serious encroachment on citizens’ rights in the name of counterterrorism has occurred within the US and abroad. A CIA program of secret detentions, torture and extraordinary rendition was set in motion with the Guantánamo prison as the most notorious festering sore.

Concurrently, Snowden has revealed that Prism — a clandestine program of electronic eavesdropping and data mining involving extensive invasion of the privacy of citizens, was started by the National Security Agency in 2007 with no proper Congressional oversight. He has also disclosed that the Xkeyscore secret computer system used by the US for searching and analyzing Internet data about foreign nationals across the world has been in operation. Human-rights treaties provide for detracting such rights under certain circumstances and within certain limits. Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the US ratified, is most commonly cited for this action.

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But derogations must be temporary and take place only in exceptional circumstances, such as emergencies, periods of civil unrest or natural disasters. Derogations must also be legally proclaimed, have prescribed time limits and be governed by principles of proportionality and nondiscrimination. Some rights and freedoms, like the right to life and the freedom from torture and slavery are not derogable.

The purpose is to have a balance between human security and national security. Civil liberty groups in the US argue that the Fourth Amendment of the US Constitution is being violated. Belatedly, Obama called for a discussion on a balance between freedoms and security. Without the high caliber of such senators like William Fulbright or Frank Church, the reaction of the US Congress to the Snowden leaks has been largely negative, clearly failing in the tasks vested in its intelligence committees. A few isolated voices like Senator Rand Paul and some representatives in the House offered tentative support for Snowden, calling his actions civil disobedience.

US-Russian relations

An immediate casualty in the fallout over Snowden has been US-Russian relations. After Snowden was granted temporary asylum in Russia, Obama's canceled his visit to Moscow to meet Putin and has put the next round of bilateral nuclear disarmament talks on hold.

This is not the first time that US-Russian relations have been disrupted by a spying scandal. In 1960, a CIA U2 spy plane piloted by Gary Powers was shot down over the Soviet Union and Powers parachuted into Soviet custody.

As a result, a well-known secret that the CIA was spying on the Soviet Union was exposed, and a planned meeting between President Eisenhower and Premier Khrushchev was abruptly canceled. Powers was tried and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, but after two years he was exchanged for a Russian prisoner.

In the Snowden case, the Russians are not involved in espionage since Snowden was not on their payroll but was seeking political asylum after leaking secrets he had access to as a National Security Agency contractor. Putin's admission of Snowden to Russia cannot be faulted in terms of realpolitik, especially as Snowden must comply with certain conditions. Indeed, it is Obama who is being faulted by some US commentators, like Robert Kaplan who wrote, "Because there has not appeared to be sufficient coherency in America's Russia policy in the first place, the U.S.-Russia dust-up over Snowden seems instigated by Obama toward no larger plan or purpose."

Adding to the fiasco was the grounding of the plane of the Bolivian president, Evo Morales, flying over Europe on the suspicion that Snowden was on board. China had adroitly avoided causing any problem with the US when Snowden left Hong Kong for Moscow.

Perhaps the most serious abdication of responsibility is by American media in protecting democracy. Remember when The Washington Post courageously took on President Nixon over the Watergate scandal, and The New York Times went to court to publish the Pentagon Papers? In a frank interview with The New York Times, Snowden gave his reasons for going elsewhere with his story.

He said: "After 9/11, many of the most important news outlets in America abdicated their role as a check to power – the journalistic responsibility to challenge the excesses of government – for fear of being seen as unpatriotic and punished in the market during a period of heightened nationalism. From a business perspective, this was the obvious strategy, but what benefited the institutions ended up costing the public dearly. The major outlets are still only beginning to recover from this cold period."

The media in other democracies may well ponder this message. [IDN-InDepthNews – August 25, 2013] □



Ryszard Kukliński believed that he would be able to prevent the war in Europe between the Warsaw Pact and NATO countries by handing in 40,265 pages of secret military documents of East Germany and People's Republic of Poland to CIA in West Germany | Wikimedia Commons

THE LAST PAGE

No Easy 'Sell' For Punitive Attack On Syria

By Ernest Corea*

WASHINGTON DC – President Barack Obama faced opposition or demands for caution both abroad and at home as he sought support for an attack on the Syrian regime’s forces in retaliation for its alleged use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people. Much of the external opposition was concentrated at the G20 summit which he attended in St. Petersburg, Russia on Sept. 5-6.

Even a letter from Pope Francis emphasized the dangers of military action that has not received prior endorsement from the UN Security Council (UNSC). In the best of all possible worlds, referring the crisis to the UNSC would make great sense, and be strictly in keeping with the principles of the UN Charter. The process is fraught with powerful obstacles, however, in a world where the ideals of the UN are so often subverted by global politicking.

An irony of the situation concerning Syria is that one of the loudest voices protesting against unilateral action by the US is Russia, Syria’s strongest patron. Russia has repeatedly urged that the US should not undertake punitive action without prior authorization from the UNSC where, of course, Russia can be counted on to veto any such proposal.

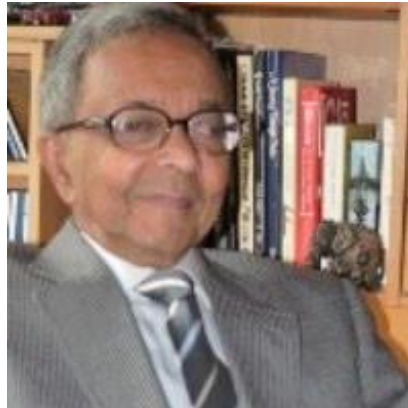
Within the US itself, opinion is fairly even divided for and against US intervention. This has become clear particularly in the Senate and House Representatives where Obama sought approval for US action against Syria in the light of its apparent contempt for the norms of the chemical weapons convention signed by some 188 countries.

Support for US action is largely on ethical grounds: wanton attacks on men, women and children with the use of prohibited weapons should be stopped early on or deaths will escalate. Opposition comes from those who remember the deaths and destruction caused when US troops were sent out to Iraq to “die for a lie.” Some critics also cite the Gulf of Tonkin resolution under which action was authorized against Hanoi in response to cooked up Intelligence of an attack on US vessels.

Obama is expected to address some of these issues in a direct appeal to the American public on his return to the US from the G20 summit.

Middle East: Palestine-Israel Peace Talks.

Fears of a wider conflict spreading across the Middle East continue to burden the people most likely to be affected, but the prospect of peace has not fully receded from the region’s perennial danger zone. “While the world debates what to do about the atrocities in Syria, Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators are operating ‘beneath the radar’ and meeting



regularly,” reports current bulletin of Christians for Middle East Peace (CMEP). The bulletin quotes Israeli journalist Shlomi Eldar as follows: “The rest of the world may be in turmoil, but Justice Minister [responsible for negotiations] Tzipi Livni and Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat still insist on talking about peace.”

A deadly West Bank raid by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) threatened a collapse of peace talks but that did not happen. Only one meeting was cancelled.

But as the tragic situation in Syria unfolds, some are asking whether peace between Israelis and Palestinians is worth spending energy on now, the bulletin points out.

Eldar responds by writing that, “Maybe all the upheavals occurring in the world provide some kind of advantage to the current round of talks. With everyone paying such rapt attention to the goings-on in Egypt and Syria, and with the concurrent lack of public interest in the talks, there is far less pressure on the negotiators, who have plenty of room to maneuver without fear of being interrupted.”

Former Congressman Lee Hamilton writing in the public affairs journal *Politico* points out: “I think the reason we find ourselves back in this familiar position is because we rightfully recognize that resolving the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is among the most important steps we can take toward reducing the overall tension in the region. Arabs continue to view this conflict as a very important dispute, and the plight of Palestinian refugees is both part of their identity and the lens through which they judge Washington and U.S. policies in the region.”

*The writer has served as Sri Lanka's ambassador to Canada, Cuba, Mexico, and the USA. He was Chairman of the Commonwealth Select Committee on the media and development, Editor of the Ceylon 'Daily News' and the Ceylon 'Observer', and was for a time Features Editor and Foreign Affairs columnist of the Singapore 'Straits Times'. He is Global Editor of and Editorial Adviser to IDN-InDepthNews as well as President of the Media Task Force of Global Cooperation Council.

The world of media luminaries lost some luster when Sir David Frost passed away on Aug. 31 after a heart attack on a luxury cruise ship where he had an engagement to speak to the travelers.

Frost's talent was internationally recognized, and his best-known set of broadcast interviews was with President Richard Nixon. The disgraced president was in seclusion when Frost persuaded him to sit for a series of interviews that were edited down to four segments which were broadcast.

Frost, as was to be expected, tried every stratagem to persuade Nixon to accept guilt. He did not oblige and for much

of the interviews all he would say concerning his views on presidential involvement in the kind of political shenanigans that brought him down was: "If the President does it, it is legitimate."

Frost was unrelenting, however, in his efforts to force more out of Nixon and eventually had to settle for this morsel: "I'm sorry. I let down my friends. I let down the country. I let down our system of government and the dreams of all those young people that sought to get into government but will think it is all too corrupt."

[IDN-InDepthNews - September 6, 2013] □



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UN PRESSES FORWARD ON GLOBAL BAN ON NUKE TESTS



By Jaya Ramachandran | IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis

NEW YORK (IDN) – Seventeen years after the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) opened for signature, the United Nations has launched a new initiative to expedite its entry into force “at the earliest possible date”.

Foreign ministers and high-level representatives from the 183 Member States of the Treaty have urged the eight remaining States – China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and the United States – to sign and ratify the CTBT, “thus ridding the world once and for all of nuclear test explosions”. Ratification by these eight countries is indispensable for the Treaty coming into force.

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EMINENT PERSONS TO SUPPORT ENTRY INTO FORCE OF GLOBAL TREATY BANNING NUCLEAR TEST



IDN-InDepth NewsDocument

To ensure an innovative and focused approach to advance the CTBT’s ratification by the remaining Annex 2 States, a group comprising eminent personalities and internationally recognized experts was launched on September 26, 2013 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Through their expertise, experience and political standing, this Group of Eminent Persons (GEM) will support and complement efforts to promote the Treaty’s entry into force as well as

reinvigorating international endeavours to achieve this goal. The Presidents of the Article XIV Conference, the Foreign Minister of Hungary, János Martonyi, and the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Marty Natalegawa, will also be members of the GEM.

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THE CONTINUING AGONY OF SYRIA



By Jayantha Dhanapala* | IDN-InDepth NewsViewpoint

KANDY, Sri Lanka (IDN) - The United Nations rose to one of its finest moments when the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2118(2013) on the September 27 addressing the outrageous use of chemical weapons in Syria while setting guidelines for a political solution to the civil war in that country. Great powers can sometimes agree to use diplomacy wisely to save the world from conflict. However the assumption that the Syrian crisis has been solved through a U.S.-Russian agreement on Syria’s chemical weapons hides the ugly reality of a continuing civil war with daily death tolls adding to a total of about 100,000, a suffering populace and an exodus of refugees now numbering 1.9 million apart from the displaced.

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WHAT ABOUT THE ‘GLOBAL RED LINE’ FOR NUKES




By Ramesh Jaura* | IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis

BERLIN (IDN) - Reputed to be an ardent campaigner for a nuclear weapons free world, ICAN has yet again called upon the powers-that-be to ban all nukes threatening the very survival of planet Earth and entire humankind. The fervent appeal by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons coincided with the UN high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament in New York.

In a statement on September 26, ICAN, a global campaign coalition of more than 300 organizations in 80 countries, asks: “Where is the ‘Global Red Line’ for Nuclear Weapons?”

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