

## Iran and its nuclear programme



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THE Iranian situation is in many ways turning out to be a *déjà vu* of the pre-Iraq war diplomatic landscape. Since transformation of the geopolitical contours in the Middle East remains an unfinished business, it seems the US is zeroing in on Iran that has been categorised as a member of "an axis of evil".

On 18 June, US President Bush said that the world would not tolerate the development of nuclear weapons by Iran. On the same day, Iran's Ambassador to the Vienna-based UN agency International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) Ali Salehi reportedly stated that "nuclear weapons had no place in the country's defensive doctrine. Iran considers the acquiring, development and use of nuclear weapons inhuman, immoral, illegal and against its very principles."

Meanwhile IAEA has issued a report accusing Iran of failing to declare some aspects of its nuclear programme and that Iran is taking "corrective" steps. Europe now also joined the US in taking a tougher stance toward Tehran and on June 16, the 15 Foreign Ministers of the European Union issued a declaration calling on Iran to conform with additional protocols of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 (NPT).

The US-Iran relations have been seriously strained since the 1979 Islamic revolution. In fact it goes back to 1953 when Iranian people witnessed how the US and Britain toppled their popular Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq just because his government nationalised the oil industry, and replaced with General Fazlollah Zahedi. In 1954 an agreement was devised in Washington and London for Iran to

pay compensation to the Anglo-Iranian Company and a consortium of seven oil companies was created to run oil operations in Iran. At present the US has been particularly disturbed by the demand of Iraqi Shi'ites to install an Islamic government in Iraq and suspects that Iran's Shi'ite clerical regime is encouraging it. For strategic reasons, Iran's power needs to be weakened and nuclear issue can easily be picked up for putting

five states (the US, Britain, France, China and Russia) to have nuclear weapons. In view of this, the regime under the NPT is highly discriminatory and thus unstable. It cannot be sustained for long. The possession of nuclear weapons by five states is a constant stimulus to other states to acquire them.

The five states insist that these weapons provide unique security benefits and reserve uniquely to themselves the right to own them.

security of all non-nuclear nations. To quote North Korea's Foreign Minister: "The Iraqi war shows that to allow disarmament through inspections does not avert war but rather sparks it. Only tremendous military deterrent force can prevent attack on nations that America dislikes". Obviously the Minister was saying that only possession of nuclear weapons could prevent the US from attacking a nation. The post-Iraq war environment has led

Lebanon (Hezbollah is against Israel's occupation of some part of Lebanon) or to other Islamic militants.

President Khatami assured President Putin of Russia that Iran would not produce nuclear weapons and the nuclear plant would be used for peaceful uses as allowed by the NPT (Article IV). But assuming that if Iran wants to go for nuclear weapons, it could press on several reasons, such as: (a) a string of decisions and pronouncements from Washington indicates that the US is on an ambitious programme to revitalise its nuclear arsenal and widen the scope of its possible uses for its security and likewise Iran has the same right to do so for its national security; (b) Iran now sees a nuclear power, the US, right next door in Iraq and the dynamics of the security situation has changed; (c) if Israel is allowed to possess nuclear weapons, balance of power in the Middle East can only be maintained by being a nuclear power; (d) Iran can easily withdraw from the NPT as North Korea had done in recent months under its Article X, and (e) the NPT is not working because no nuclear power including the US has commenced negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons under the provisions of the NPT.

### Weakening of the UN

Another important factor in which global security has been threatened is the weakening of the role of the UN in maintenance of international peace and security. States acting to protect unilaterally their security, as they see it, has given rise to similar security problems elsewhere. If security is to be strengthened, the UN must come in picture in terms of threats to security of states. However reliance on the UN has evaporated when the US pre-emptively attacked Iraq without UN authority. A fundamental dilemma confronting the international community is that it faces a superpower that uses its might to contain perceived threat without going through the mechanism of the UN.

### Conclusion

It is acknowledged that all states want to be secured against external threats or instruments of coercion by another state. The Iraq war demonstrates that there is now far more scope than before for war. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bipolar world has disappeared and new kinds of threat and turbulence have risen. The dominant theme in world affairs appears to be "might is right". The proliferation of weaponry of every degree of sophistication by the US has given a sharp new edge to security concerns of many nations.

Some suggest that there is an element of double standard in proselytizing against nuclear weapons. It has been pointed out that a country that has thousands of nuclear warheads is in no position to preach to others not having nuclear weapons. No wonder the way the US wields its great power has worried many people across the globe and a recent BBC sampling of public opinion about the US in 11 nations (Australia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, France, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Russia, South Korea and the US) paints a picture of an arrogant superpower which is a greater danger than North Korea and Iran -- two members of President Bush's axis of evil. Like it or not, that's what the majority of people in these countries think and possibly that's not going to change unless the US changes its policy.

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## BOTTOM LINE

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pressure on Iranian leaders to divert their attention from Iraq. This is more so at a time when at home Iran has been confronted with mass demonstrations of students to implement reforms and change the style of its government.

### Non-proliferation regime

Given the tension between the US and Iran, let us dispassionately discuss the nuclear programme of Iran. It is admitted that the destructiveness of nuclear weapons is immense and any use would be catastrophic. Since 1945 no such weapon has been used by nuclear powers. The proposition that nuclear weapons can be retained in perpetuity by a handful of states and never used -- accidentally or by decision -- defies credibility. The only complete safety is the elimination of nuclear weapons and assurance that they will never be produced by any state.

Accordingly, the 1968 NPT was concluded with its promise of a world free of nuclear weapons. It rests on the premise that both nuclear and non-nuclear states will seriously ensure the elimination of nuclear weapons. About 177 countries including Bangladesh and Iran are parties to the Treaty (India and Pakistan are not). The NPT allows

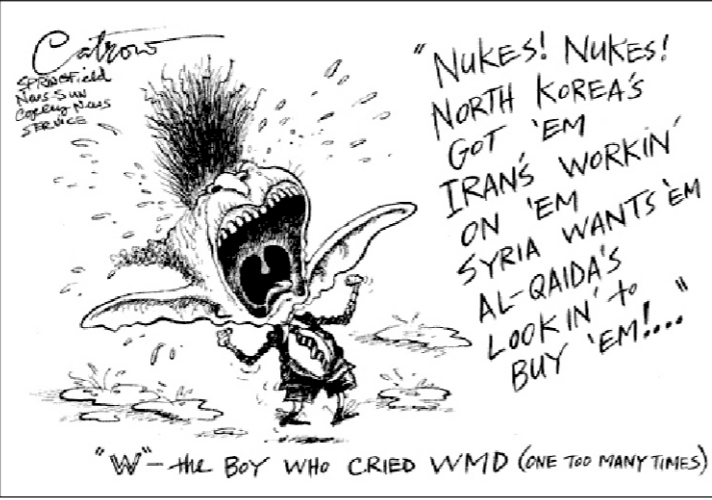
Subsequently the nuclear powers tolerated production and possession of nuclear weapons by Israel, India and Pakistan. Now North Korea has declared that it is a nuclear power and it is reported that they possess anywhere from three to six nuclear warheads. This implies that horizontal expansion of nuclear weapons has continued.

The NPT is not a one-way street. It obliges both non-nuclear and nuclear weapon states to discharge their obligations in terms of the Treaty. Non-nuclear states will not

many nations to think about acquiring nuclear weapons to safeguard their national security.

Another aspect that merits attention is that if US can live with nuclear Israel, India and Pakistan, what is wrong with Iran? It seems that possession of nuclear weapons *per se* is not the issue, it is which country has it. In other words, the test appears to be: is a country an ally of the US or not? Since the US has identified Iran as part of an "axis of evil", it should not have nuclear weapons. It is as simple as that.

### Nuclear programme in



"W" - THE BOY WHO CRIED WMD (ONE TOO MANY TIMES)

acquire or produce nuclear weapons on the premise that nuclear weapon states undertake to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to "cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament" (Article VI of the Treaty). It was a bargain to be kept by both nuclear and non-nuclear states.

It appears that the obligation under the NPT by nuclear weapon states is honoured by its breach. The five nuclear states have not committed themselves to negotiations in the elimination of nuclear weapons. In fact on May 1, 2001 (well before the September terrorist attacks) President Bush declared: "Nuclear weapons have a vital role to play in our security and that of our allies".

### US's policy

The Bush administration's Nuclear Posture Review completed in 2001 called for new and improved nuclear weapons. New weapons require testing and having refused to ratify the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the US faces no legal impediment to resumption of nuclear tests. In doing so the US has threatened to inflict irreparable damage on the NPT regime.

Furthermore the pre-emptive war on Iraq without UN authority is being perceived to have endangered

### Iran: Argument for and against

The fact is that Russia has been building a nuclear plant in Iran and the US considers that the "real" purpose of it is to produce nuclear weapons has raised concerns in the US. It has put pressure on Russia not to proceed with the construction work but Russia has withstood the pressure and continues to build it as a commercial enterprise with an estimated cost of US\$ 800 million. Lately Russia is getting firmer with Iran asking that the nuclear fuel should be transported back to Russia. This action will prevent Iran from using nuclear fuel (enriched uranium) of the plant to produce nuclear weapons.

Let us first consider arguments that can possibly be advanced against Iran for its nuclear programme: (a) Iran is a party to NPT and has in some ways breached its obligations under the NPT for not being transparent of some aspects of its nuclear plant, (b) US considers that Iran, being an oil rich country, does not need nuclear plant for generating electricity, (c) US thinks that Iran's nuclear weapons could threaten stability in the region, in particular to its ally, Israel and (d) Iran's anti-US and Israeli policies may lead to easy accessibility of nuclear material for making dirty bombs to Hezbollah in



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## Silence is not spoken here

BANGLADESH, the most densely populated country on earth, presented the starkest contrast of wealth and poverty I saw in South Asia. Looking out the window from our hotel room in Dhaka, I could see a wooden fence that ran between shanties and garbage heaps on one side and the swimming pool and cabanas where visitors like me could enjoy a drink and a swim on the other. It was like looking at a stereopticon of the global economy. Here, the authorities made no effort to the destitute behind brightly colored cloth. The city was wall-to-wall people, more people per square foot than I had ever seen anywhere, all moving in small cars that clogged the roads or in huge crowds that spilled into those roads. More than once, I gasped as a car narrowly skimmed a group of people. Walking outside in the heat and humidity was like stepping into a steam sauna. But this was another country I had long wanted to visit, because it was home to two internationally recognized projects -- the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research (ICDDR/B) in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the Grameen Bank, a pioneer of microcredit.

The ICDDR/B is an important example of the positive results that come from foreign aid. Dysentery is a leading cause of death, particularly among children, in parts of the world where there are limited sources of clean drinking water. The ICDDR/B developed "oral rehydration therapy" (ORT), a solution composed mostly of salt, sugar and water, that is easy to administer and responsible for saving the lives of millions of children. This simple, inexpensive solution has been called one of the most important medical advances of the century, and the hospital that pioneered it depends on American aid. The success of ORT is also a model for the type of low-tech, low-cost treatment developed abroad that can be replicated in the U.S.

I had first learned about the Grameen Bank more than a decade earlier, when Bill and I invited the bank's founder, Dr. Muhammad Yunus, to Little Rock to discuss how microcredit lending programs might help some of the poorest rural communities in Arkansas. The Grameen Bank provides loans to very poor women who have no other access to credit. With loans averaging about \$50, women have started small businesses -- like dressmaking, weaving and farming -- that help lift them and their families out of poverty. These women have not only proven to be excellent credit risks -- the Grameen Bank has a loan repayment rate of 98 percent -- but dedicated savers as well, who tend to reinvest their profits in their business and their families. I helped set up a development bank and micro-lending groups in Arkansas, and I wanted to promote micro-lending throughout the United States, modeled on the success of Yunus and the Grameen Bank. They have provided or facilitated assistance to similar programs around the world, distributing \$3.7 billion in collateral-free loans to 2.4 million members with borrowers in more than forty-one thousand villages in Bangladesh and elsewhere.

But triumphs in helping landless women gain self-sufficiency has made the Grameen Bank (and other similar programs) a target for Islamic fundamentalists. Two days before we arrived in Dhaka, some two thousand extremists marched on the capital to denounce secular aid organizations, which they accused of tempting women to defy a strict interpretation of the Quran. In the months before our visit, village banks and girls' schools had been torched, and one of Bangladesh's leading women writers had received death threats.

One of the most disconcerting aspects of security is that you never know how to identify a truly dangerous moment. The Secret Service had received intelligence suggesting that an extremist group might try to disrupt my visit. When I traveled outside the capital to visit two villages in southwestern Bangladesh, flying in a U.S. Air Force C-130 transport plane, we were again on high alert. In the village of Jessore, we visited a primary school where the government was testing a program that rewarded families with money and food if they allowed their daughters to attend. This seemed like a novel inducement to persuade families to send their girls to school in the first place -- and then let them stay there. We showed up at the school, which was in the middle of open fields, and I went into the classrooms to talk to the girls and their teachers. While talking to students, I noticed a commotion outside and saw Secret Service agents running around. Thousands of villagers had materialized out of thin air, pouring over a little rise, ten

to twenty people deep as far as I could see. We had no idea where they came from or what message they might have wanted to deliver. We never found out because my agents swept us out of there, afraid of a crowd they might not be able to control.

Our visit to the Grameen Bank in the village of Mashihata was worth battling the crowds and the long, bumpy drive. I had been invited to visit two villages -- one Hindu and one Muslim -- but I could not manage both because of my schedule. Remarkably, the Muslim women decided to come to the Hindu village for our meeting.

"Swagatam, Hillary, swagatam, Chelsea," the children sang in Bengali. "Welcome, Hillary, welcome, Chelsea!" My old friend Muhammad Yunus was there to greet me, bearing samples of clothing that some of Grameen's women borrowers had made for sale. Both Chelsea and I were wearing similar outfits, which he sent to the hotel for us, and he was delighted. He said a few words echoing the theme I had been developing in my own speeches.

"Women have potential," he said. "And access to credit is not only an effective way to fight poverty, it is also a fundamental human right."

I sat under a thatched pavilion surrounded by Hindu and Muslim women, and the told me how they had all come together, defying the fundamentalists. I told them I was there to listen to them, and to learn.

A Muslim woman stood up and said, "We are sick of the mullahs, they are always trying to keep women down."



Hillary and Chelsea Clinton and Professor Muhammad Yunus with a Grameen borrower during Mrs Clinton's visit to Grameen Bank Barobazar Kaligoni branch in Jessore on April 3, 1995. Both Hillary and Chelsea are wearing Grameen Check outfits.

I asked what sorts of problems they faced, an she said: "They threaten to ban us if we take loans from the bank. They tell us the bank will steal our children. I tell them to leave us alone. We are trying to help our children have better lives."

The women asked me questions to try to relate my experiences to theirs. "Do you have cattle in your home?" said one.

"No," I replied, grinning at the traveling press corps, who by that time were like members of a large extended family, "unless you count the press room."

The Americans laughed out loud, while the Bangladeshis pondered the meaning of my quip.

"Do you earn your own income?" asked a woman with a decorative red dot, or teep, on her forehead between her eyes, traditionally signifying that she was married.

"I am not earning my own income now that my husband is President," I said, wondering how to explain what I was doing. I told them I used to earn more money than my husband, and I planned to earn my own income again.

The children of the village put on a play for us, and a few women approached Chelsea and me to show us how to wear our own decorative teeps and how to wrap a sari. I was struck by the positive spirit of the people I met in this poor, isolated village who lived without electricity or running water, but with hope, thanks, in part, to the work of the Grameen Bank.

I wasn't the only one moved by the village women. One of the American journalists who stood near me, listening to our discussion, leaned in and whispered, "Silence is not spoken here."

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