

Iran's Elections and Its Implications

by Harun ur Rashid

Iran has entered into a new chapter of its Islamic revolution and democracy has become a reality in the country. Iran is a regional power and its growing military strength and increasing diplomatic interaction are recognised by every one. Iran's standing will be further consolidated by the outcome of the parliamentary elections.

IRAN IS the only Islamic country, except Turkey, in West Asia where the people have the right to change a government through ballots. This time the people of Iran, nearly 39 million voters, have spoken loudly and clearly in the parliamentary elections held on 18 February.

They have elected in large numbers the reformist candidates to the legislative body (Majlis) in preference to the conservative candidates. In Tehran they have succeeded in almost wiping out the conservatives who contested the election. Many conservative stalwarts were defeated. Even in the traditional conservative areas, the reformists were elected. The result is an overwhelming victory for President Khatami.

The final results will be known in a few days and of the 290 seats, at the time of writing, the reformists won 137 while the conservatives only 44 seats. Many women candidates were elected and it will be the first time that women as the members of the parliament will be able to express their views on the laws of the land.

The results were not unexpected in favour of the reformists. Last year the reformist candidates did well in the municipal elections. The majority of Iranian people are under 25 years of age and the voting age starts at 16. The young people supported the reformists. They want freedom of expression and freedom in the way they conduct themselves in public. This is more so specially for the women. They do not like to be told what they can do and cannot do. They oppose strict Islamic codes imposed on them in their day today life.

The results have strengthened the hands of reformist President Mohammad Khatami who was elected in May, 1997. He wants to create a civil society within Islamic democracy. His liberal ideas and policies have become popular among the young people. He is popularly known as 'Iranian Gorbachev'.

However, President Khatami has not been able to make any significant progress in the loosening of the stranglehold of the conservatives. His reforms were not supported by the conservatives who held majority in the parliament. At every step, the President's efforts to implement his reforms were frustrated by the parliament and other organs of the state.

Iran has a dual system of administration. Democratic institutions coexist with an Islamic theocracy headed by the spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The President and the members of the Parliament (Majlis) are elected by the people. At the same time, the Council of Guardians, a non-elected body of Ulema have enormous powers. The spiritual leader is vested with the supreme power including his control over the vital instruments of the state; the courts, the police, the intelligence services and the armed forces.

Political commentators believe that there is likely to be a confrontation between the conservative non-elected elements and the reformists unless the conservatives acknowledge that their ideology has been rejected and they have lost the battle with the Iranian people. Time will only tell how the potential conflict is resolved.

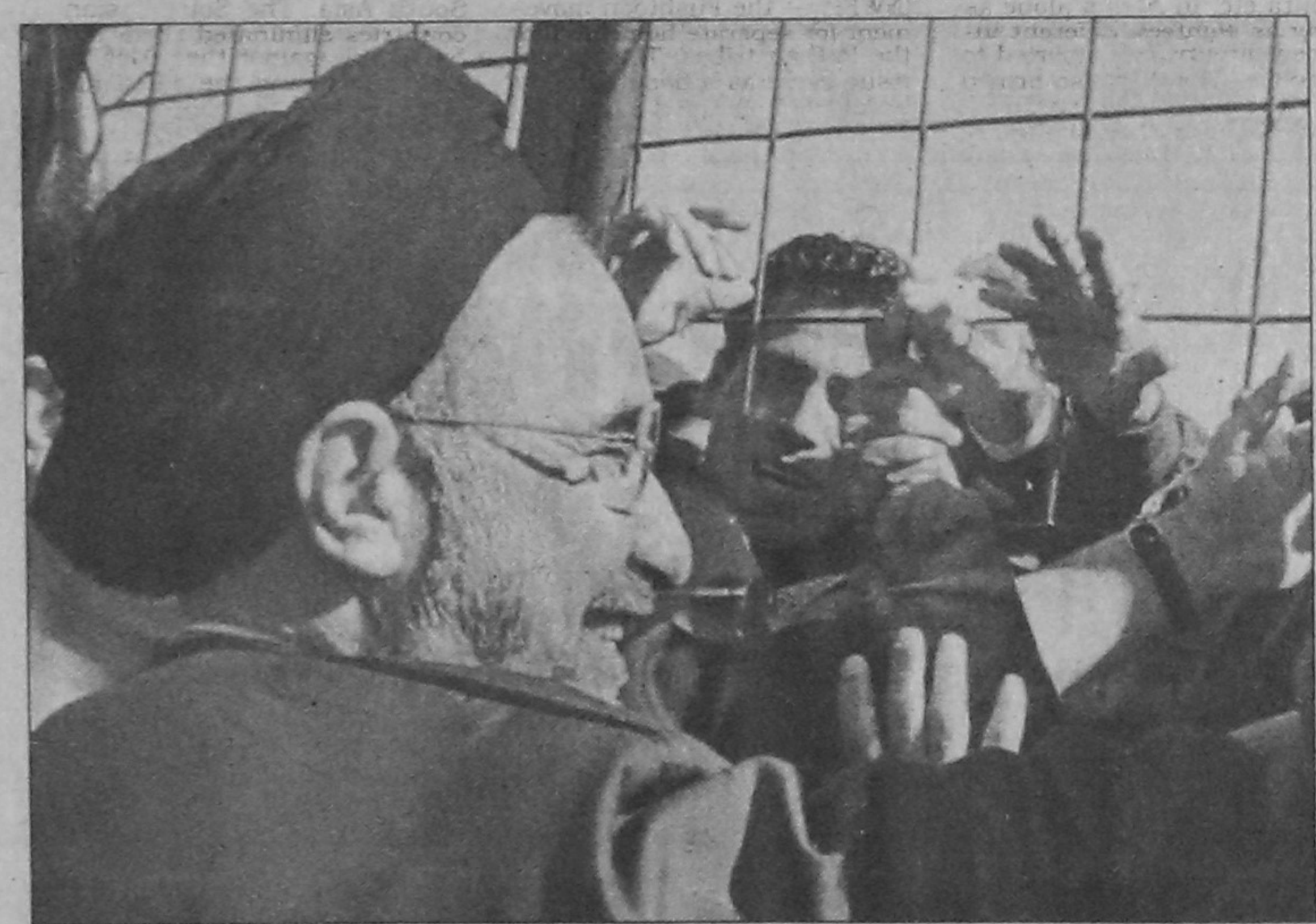
President Khatami has a strategy to fight his opponents within the constitutional framework. He himself will avoid any confrontation that threatens the Islamic character

of the state or the special claim to power of those who are learned in Islamic theology. However, the President has a road map of making Iran an open Islamic society and has been given a mandate to fulfil his promise of reforms. With the backing of the reformists in the parliament, the President will be now able to introduce reforms in political, social and cultural fields. President Khatami has to deliver his reforms to the people and he will not be able to defend himself any more by accusing the obstructionist policy of the parliament.

The western countries including the US have welcomed the election results. They look forward to enter into closer relationship with Iran. President Khatami is unlikely to rush to repair relations with the US unless the US offers some opening gestures first to Iran, say freezing the Iranian money from its banks or from its list of 'terrorist' countries.

The Gulf Arab countries will perhaps see that a 'radical' Iran is being removed from its frontiers. There is a view that Arab monarchies or Sheikdoms will be less dependent on the US as they will lose their fear of Tehran's exporting 'Islamic revolution' in the Middle Eastern countries.

Iran has entered into a new chapter of its Islamic revolution and democracy has become a reality in the country. Iran is a regional power and its growing military strength and increasing diplomatic interaction are recognised by every one. Iran's standing will be further consolidated by the outcome of the parliamentary elections. The author, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.



Iranian President Mohammad Khatami greets supporters after the inauguration of the first underground subway line in Tehran 21 February 2000.

US Decision on Missile Defence

by Henry Kissinger

Until we have chosen the appropriate national missile defence, negotiations with Moscow about modifying the ABM treaty take place in a vacuum. A quick-fix solution is both foolhardy and dangerous. For it risks putting our leaders 10 years from now, when technology has moved on again, into the same straitjacket in which they find themselves today.

THE Clinton Administration is approaching the congressionally mandated deadline for a decision on whether to deploy a national missile defence with all the ambivalence of a dreaded visit to a dentist, mitigated by the fantasy that Moscow would make little sense. In the light of recent ambiguous test results and imminent electoral preoccupations, it would be desirable to delay a final technical judgment until a new administration is in place. And we should suspend further talks with Moscow until we have decided on the kind of missile defence most in the national interest. The decision should define the parameters of the dialogue. But since the strategic importance of missile defence is independent of its technical characteristics, the interim should be used for educating the American public and for an intensive dialogue with our allies in both Europe and Asia.

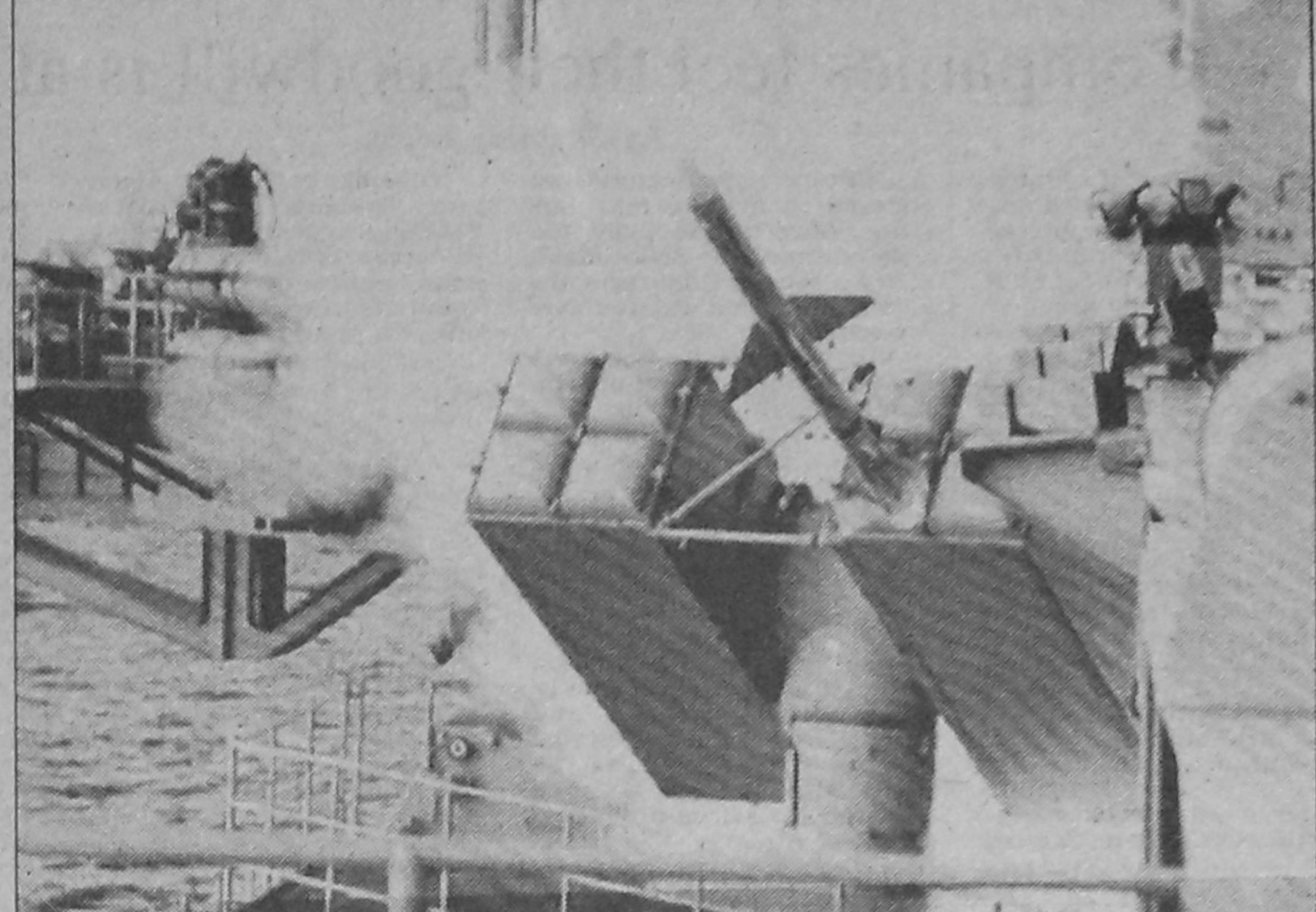
A president's first obligation is to provide for the safety of the American people by deterring attacks on the American homeland and our allies, and by reducing their impact should they take place. The danger is both real and growing. In 1998 the bipartisan Rumsfeld Commission unanimously concluded that the threat posed by a number of hostile emerging states 'is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly than has been reported in estimates and reports by the Intelligence Community'.

Furthermore, 'the US might well have little or no warning before operational deployment' of missiles capable of reaching US territory with biological, chemical or nuclear warheads. In other words, we are not dealing with an academic inside-the-Beltway arms-control debate but with a challenge to the very heart of American security. Nevertheless, national missile defence has become one of those symbolic issues around which elite opinion has been divided for decades, regardless of intervening political and technological changes. Four arguments are generally put forward in opposition to a national missile defence - and seem to me to be accepted by many in the Administration, especially on the foreign policy side of it:

- (1) that a workable system cannot be designed;
- (2) that if it was, it would undermine the long-established American strategic doctrine called Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD);
- (3) that it violates the 1972 ABM Treaty, which proscribes national missile defences and this would jeopardize the entire gamut of Russo-American relations;
- (4) that our European allies will interpret an anti-missile programme, as decoupling the defence of Europe from America, because the United States may be perceived as withdrawing into a Fortress America.

(Interestingly, this argument is never heard from our Asian allies.) I am not a technical expert, but I have been exposed to enough briefings to be persuaded that, the technical problems could be solved, provided that a workable system cannot be designed; that if it was, it would undermine the long-established American strategic doctrine called Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD); that it violates the 1972 ABM Treaty, which proscribes national missile defences and this would jeopardize the entire gamut of Russo-American relations; that our European allies will interpret an anti-missile programme, as decoupling the defence of Europe from America, because the United States may be perceived as withdrawing into a Fortress America.

In any event, whatever tenuous plausibility the MAD theory had in a two-power world disappears when eight nations have tested nuclear weapons and many rogue regimes are working feverishly on the development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction and the ballistic missiles to deliver them. If one of these destroyed an American



A Sea Sparrow missile launches from a US Navy aircraft carrier during a missile exercise in the Pacific.

city by accident or design, how would a United States president explain his refusal to protect our country against even limited attacks?

Since I have held and published these views for four decades, one is entitled to ask why an ABM Treaty was signed by President Richard Nixon in 1972, when I served as National Security Adviser? The blunt answer is that the Nixon Administration started its term in office determined to move away from a MAD concept, but was partially forced back into its framework by congressional and bureaucratic pressures.

Early in his first term, Nixon ordered the Pentagon to develop a strategy concentrating on military rather than civilian targets. In 1969 he also submitted to Congress a missile-defence programme. Twelve sites were to protect missile silos and the population against limited attacks from the Soviet Union, against attacks from emerging nuclear powers and against accidental and unauthorized launch from any source.

Nixon's ABM programme was assailed by exactly the same arguments one hears today; that it would not work; that it was destabilizing; that it would weaken the Atlantic Alliance. Amid the passions of the Vietnam protest and in a Congress dominated by liberal Democrats, these criticisms merged with the prevailing assault on the defence budget as a whole. Nixon's ABM authorization passed the Senate by one vote, that of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew. In subsequent years, Congress used the appropriations process to destroy what it had narrowly failed to defeat in the original authorization. Each year, the number of ABM sites was reduced by Congress until, by late 1971, only two sites remained. And the Soviets, aware of these anti-military pressures, were stonewalling discussions on limiting their offensive building until proceeding at the rate of more than 200 long-range missile launchers a year. In this atmosphere, the Defence De-

partment, in the person of Deputy Secretary of Defence David Packard, urged President Nixon in late spring of 1970 that a new arms-control agreement was needed as soon as possible lest the Soviets outstrip us in their building programme of strategic forces.

Nixon was far from converted to the MAD theory but, faced with a Congress gutting the ABM programme, decided to freeze - and thereby preserve - a nucleus ABM deployment in return for equivalent limits on the Soviets' own ABM deployment, and to use that decision to put a ceiling on the Soviet offensive build-up. At the Moscow summit of 1972, the Soviets accepted the American insistence that offensive weapons be limited simultaneously with defensive weapons.

This history is relevant because many who treat the ABM Treaty as the cornerstone of arms control misunderstand the original impetus for it. And the contrast between the situation of 1972 and that of today is stark. The bipartisan Rumsfeld Ballistic Missile Threat Commission has unanimously described the new security environment. One signatory, the Soviet Union, has disappeared as a legal entity. Missile technologies have evolved in sophistication and proliferated into nations (North Korea, Iran, Iraq) not even remotely considered as candidates when the agreement was concluded.

Secretary of Defence William Cohen confirmed the findings of the Rumsfeld Commission on Jan. 20, 1999, when he stated: "... we are affirming that there is a threat, and the threat is growing and that we expect it will soon pose a danger not only to our troops overseas but also to Americans here at home." In short, in the existing strategic environment the ABM Treaty constrains the nation's defence to an intolerable degree. As for European reactions, it must be kept in mind that our NATO allies have made comparable arguments about every major new American weapons programme for the past 30 years - from 'flexible response' in the 1960s, to the Strategic

Defence Initiative (SDI) and intermediate-range missiles in the 1980s. Opposing new offensive weapons placed in Europe in the 1980s and new defensive weapons based in America in the '90s, these critics have charged on each occasion that the new programmes would decouple America from Europe and torpedo important negotiations with Moscow. In each case, the critics have been proved wrong.

In the Nixon Administration, the ABM programme broke the deadlock in East-West negotiations. In the Reagan Administration, SDI and intermediate-range missiles in Europe brought the Soviets back to the conference table. And with 20,000 nuclear weapons in the Russian nuclear arsenal, it will be many decades if ever that an American missile-defence programme shuts down all Russian nuclear options, even as it constrains many of them. This should give time for an East-West diplomacy designed to move a nuclear conflict between the two largest nuclear countries to an ever-lower level of probability.

Finally, once Europe disentangles itself from outdated slogans, it will come to understand that a system that protects America against limited nuclear attacks, and even more against rogue nuclear blackmail, will enhance rather than diminish our willingness to defend our allies. An America totally vulnerable to any kind of nuclear threat from any direction is much more likely to shrink from fulfilling its alliance obligations. And sooner or later Europe will recognize that these arguments apply as well to the defence of European territory against missile attack.

China, which is not a signatory of the ABM Treaty, has been vocal in its criticism of an American missile defence. No doubt, China is more seriously affected by a missile-defence system than Russia because its arsenal is so much smaller and will remain so for several decades. Beijing's concern that a US missile defence will, to some extent, blunt the impact of the ballistic missile arsenal it has been building at a rapid pace is understandable. I have demonstrated a long commitment to cooperative relations with China and I strongly oppose the tendencies toward confrontation emerging in both countries. But we cannot leave our people defenceless in the face of foreseeable nuclear threats from so many quarters to placate even a country so important as China.

For all these reasons, a nationwide missile-defence system should be deployed as soon as is technologically feasible. An impressive array of technical options - land, sea or space - cannot be adequately explored until we overcome ABM treaty restrictions. At this writing, our national priorities with respect to missile defence are the reverse of what is needed. We are talking to Russia about modifying the existing system without having as yet decided what programme best serves our security and that of our allies.

Until we have chosen the appropriate national missile defence, negotiations with Moscow about modifying the ABM treaty take place in a vacuum. A quick-fix solution is both foolhardy and dangerous. For it risks putting our leaders 10 years from now, when technology has moved on again, into the same straitjacket in which they find themselves today. Only when we have defined our necessities can we conduct a meaningful dialogue on whether to amend or, if necessary, revoke the treaty.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

It's a Deal - Paid to Drink Pesticides!

Gavin Evans writes from London

Thousands of ordinary people are being paid to test chemicals and medicines, to find out whether they work and discover the side-effects. But how dangerous are the trials and are the human guinea-pigs warned of the risks? A Gemini News Service correspondent looks at a growing ethical debate over tests involving pesticides.

To a cash-strapped student or an unemployed job-seeker, the offer of several hundred pounds for swallowing a glass of 'fruit juice' or an innocent-looking capsule is hard to refuse - especially when assurances are given that the process is ethically sound, independently monitored and risk-free.

Robert Lonie is one of many young people in Edinburgh volunteering for such medical experiments - a regular source of income for many of us students. When Lonie was invited by the Edinburgh-based Inveresk Medical Research Laboratory to test azinphosmethyl for the German drugs giant Bayer for a fee of £400, he was assured the project had been approved by an ethics committee, and that the drugs had been proved to be harmless to humans.

In the event, Lonie could not take part in the test because he was on other medication, but the asked his mother - a science teacher - to find out more about azinphosmethyl.

"She told me it was a potentially lethal organophosphate pesticide, not registered for use in the UK. To say I was angry would be an understatement. I felt they had asked me to swallow poison without explaining what it was and what risks were involved."

Lonie later discovered that azinphosmethyl belongs to a group of highly toxic insecticides, which target a blood enzyme essential to the nervous system. A student he subsequently met had suffered from pesticide poisoning after similar testing carried out by another company.

Bayer insists its tests are perfectly safe and carried out under strict international ethical and scientific guidelines. Spokesman Michael George says the company has had "no reports of anyone suffering from adverse side-effects."

Hundreds of British students, unemployed people and immigrants are eagerly ingesting unlicensed chemicals for money. An advertisement in

The Big Issue, a weekly magazine for homeless people, offers £100 per day for "taking part in medical trials all approved by ethical review boards."

In 1985 two British student volunteers died after participating in trials. Although some trials are for drugs that might be of benefit to medical science, an increasing number involve potentially harmful organophosphate pesticides. Bayer is one of a number of manufacturers testing pesticides in Britain.

Testing is prompted by United States food safety legislation aimed at protecting children from harmful pesticides. To obtain licences from the US Food and Drugs Administration, manufacturers need to test

their products on large numbers of humans. Britain has emerged as an international centre for testing, due to its relative lack of controls and independent safeguards.

MP Paul Tyler, who heads a 90-strong Organophosphate Group in Parliament, suspects the country is seen as a "soft touch" by US and European companies, and claims "they are getting away with tests here they wouldn't have dared to try at home."

Tyler has questioned the government on the flimsy ethical controls on private drug companies and laboratories, and says that "in effect, they are their own policemen - there is no outside monitoring. Instead

they are monitored by the companies themselves, who set up their own ethical review boards."

Bayer's Michael George insists that Inveresk is used for test programmes because "they have an excellent international reputation."

"But claims by manufacturers that the tests present no danger to volunteers are coming increasingly under fire, and a number of their safety assurances have subsequently been disproved.

The Organophosphate Information Network, a volunteer organisation set up to raise public awareness, says it has reports of 700 people suffering chronic symptoms as a result of occupational exposure to

pesticides. Network coordinator Elizabeth Sigmund points out that "even low-level exposure can result in damage to the central nervous system leading to clinical depression, headaches and short-term memory loss."

Sigmund says "the organophosphate involved in Lonie's case was the first-ever human trial for azinphosmethyl. But her advice 'to any would-be human guinea pig' is 'say no to any form of organophosphate - no matter how financially desperate you are. Even at low doses, the direct ingestion of any organophosphate carries a high risk, and the damage is cumulative.'"

Such concerns are backed by

a 10-year survey of British clinical drug trials, which revealed serious flaws in safety procedures. In one-third of the 226 trials sampled, the report showed "significant under-reporting" of side-effects. Forty-three per cent of patients were not given clear instructions, and in over half the trials there were doubts about proper storage of the drugs.

Dr Wendy Bohaychuk, editor of Clinical Research Focus, the journal that published the survey results, comments: "I would never go into a clinical study myself, and I would certainly try to discourage anyone in my family from doing so."

Denise Horn of the Ministry of Agriculture agrees that "people should think twice about using organophosphates," but points out, "This is contract research and is therefore covered by the international protocols and the guidelines of the Royal College of Physicians."

In practice, this means "it is up to the client to satisfy itself that ethical conditions are be-

ing complied with, and there is no government control on the process."

Inveresk Laboratory, however, says in a statement that "trials are conducted under appropriate medical and nursing supervision, an independent committee advises on the ethical aspects of the trials," and that "all relevant information" is given to the ethics review committee and those taking part.

Such assurances are not enough for Paul Tyler. "We know that organophosphate-based products are extremely dangerous to human health, and there are suspicions that their use may be related to the spread of BSE [mad cow disease] in cattle, but many of these human guinea pigs are simply not being given sufficient information about the chemicals concerned."

The author is a writer and freelance journalist based in London.

TOM & JERRY
SCROUNGING IN GARBAGE CANS AGAIN?



SCROUNGING IS NOT THE CORRECT TERM. PARTAKE IS MORE APPROPRIATE.



THIS HAPPENS TO BE THE GARBAGE CAN OF A GOURMET.



James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY NORAK



HERE'S YAMU - A GOOD LAD, NO ENGLISH, BUT HE KNOWS BOATS - AND KNOWS THESE SEAS! WE'LL SHARE THE WATCHES -

