

# Iran: Engagement the only option

M. SERAJUL ISLAM

JOHN Bolton, President Bush's Ambassador to UN in New York, did not particularly endear himself to the Muslim world by his views and actions while in office. In fact, he enraged the entire Muslim world by his neo-con views and defended President Bush's "you are with us or against us" view with passion and conviction till the Senate denied him congressional approval in 2006 for a new term.

It was, therefore, hardly a surprise that in his recent post-editorial "Time for an Israeli attack" that appeared in the Washington Post's July 2nd edition, Bolton wrote that "Israel's decision on whether to use military force against Iran's nuclear weapons programme is more urgent than ever." While trashing President Obama's overtures towards Iran, he urged Israel to go ahead and take out Iran's assumed nuclear capabilities. He argued that the recent events in Iran proved that the clerics were again firmly back in power and there is no way that there would be a peaceful regime change in Iran and that it is the right time now for a military strike against it. Bolton went on to suggest that Iran has been working for the last twenty years to acquire nuclear weapons and only "the most theologically committed to negotiations still believe that Iran will renounce its nuclear programme", a comment aimed at ridiculing President Obama.

One would have thought that with the end of the Bush era and emergence of Obama, people like Bolton would be history; it does not seem to be so. The events in Iran have acted as a catalyst to bring these individuals and forces back. The election in Iran may not have been to the satisfaction of the west. But then, for a president who has not led his country very badly in the first term re-election should have been a normal event and hardly one to take the west by the extent of surprise it has.

As the demonstrations turned violent leading to few deaths, "breaking stories"

by the western media suggested widespread opposition in Iran against the ruling clergy and that their stranglehold on Iran was under serious threat. The media hype encouraged and influenced most of the western countries to believe that President Mahmoud Ahmdehine had not won the election fairly although the disturbances were mostly in Tehran. Even after a partial recount was ordered by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei that made no difference to the results, western leaders kept up issuing statements against the election.

Britain led the charge: Prime Minister Gordon Brown warned that Iran must answer satisfactorily serious questions of election irregularity. Obama, who on election day in Iran, said "we are excited to see what appears to be a robust debate taking place in Iran" later expressed critical views of the election as the western media reported the spread of violence. Surprisingly, the concerns and criticisms came only from the western countries while others either congratulated Ahmdehine's re-election or remained silent.

The western countries overlooked a few crucial facts and jumped to too many conclusions. For example, they failed to see that Moussavi's past is hardly one to convince anyone that if elected he would end the clergy in Iran. As Prime Minister, from 1980-89, he has been responsible for many of the allegations of human rights violation for which the west has been targeting Iran ever since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The western media has also failed to tell the world that on the nuclear option there is little to choose between Ahmdehine and Moussavi, as there is between the generations in Iran. They have also failed to mention that Iran is surrounded by nuclear weapons states on all sides, with the one most critical of her for her alleged nuclear pretensions, namely Israel, which is also the most dangerously armed with nuclear weapons. John Bolton and people like him forget that in the present day, people are capable of forming their independent

opinion, thanks to the information revolution and the internet. Iranians, old and young, know about Israel and its nuclear capabilities and when the focus is on Israel, Iranians, both old and young, have no reason to fight or differ.

The views of Bolton and others like him notwithstanding, the elections have brought to surface genuine democratic aspirations within Iran. Majority of Iranians today are citizens who have grown up in a world that did not see the regime of the Shah and the struggle of the people of Iran to overthrow that regime. They have grown up without the hatred for the US and increasingly with a feeling that Iran must interact with the west for its own future. For the clergy, these developments have come as a wake-up call that Iran must change to take care of the aspirations of a new generation of Iranians who have grown up with full knowledge of the world outside and very appreciative of what is happening in that world.

The post election developments have revealed divisions within the clergy that could also eventually change Iran from within, in its own time and pace. Former President Rafsanjani, a very powerful cleric, has openly confronted Ahmdehine. His daughter was arrested and released as a supporter of Moussavi. The Supreme Leader and the Grand Council have taken decisions that have been conciliatory towards the supporters of Moussavi. We have nevertheless also seen that despite their inner differences, the Iranian clergy is united in their stand against the West's interference in the politics of their country and that once conviction was backed with the authority of the state, the demonstrations died down as Iran's situation returned back to normal. Even Bolton acknowledges this with the opening sentence of his op-ed where he writes: "Iran's hard-line Mullahs and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards are unmistakably back in control..." These developments in Iran as a consequence of the election will certainly place



Ahmdehine under pressure from within to accept President Obama's offer of engagement. In fact, the controversy surrounding the election will now create pressure upon Ahmdehine to be flexible to accommodate the views of Moussavi supporters in negotiations with the US. President Obama can ensure this by following up on his offer towards Iran made before the election by ignoring views of people like Bolton and the media hype following the election.

The recent events in Iran bring back to memory the Tiananmen massacre of June 4th 1989 in China. The West expected then that with their encouragement, Chinese communist leadership would fall making China a western style democracy! Articles portraying Ziang Zemin as worthless, who would be blown away if the struggle continued, appeared in western newspapers for years after the Tiananmen Massacre till

China proved convincingly its capability of dealing with its development efforts, both political and economic. Today, China unequivocally speaks for itself with its success.

With Iran, the west should not make the same mistake as it did with China following Tiananmen in assessing reality. The foundations of the Iranian clergy have deep roots in the society, the current demonstrations notwithstanding. One must not forget that the candidature of Moussavi was approved by the Clergy together with that of Ahmdehine. Moussavi, if elected, would have represented the clergy as devotedly as Ahmdehine on all issues including the nuclear issue. If the west is seriously concerned about Iran turning into a nuclear weapons state, the best way to deal with it is to engage with it because, despite the post-election disturbances, there is no reason to

believe that those who supported Moussavi would also support the west in their effort to stop Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, if the leadership there should so decide.

Iran is not Iraq. Despite the recent disturbances, Iran is united against external interference in its internal affairs. Hence Bolton's recommendation to take on Iran militarily can be taken seriously only in a fit of madness. Obama should set the disturbances aside and continue to follow the path of engagement with Iran that he set for his administration with his Cairo speech in June. He may be pleasantly surprised to find Ahmdehine more accommodating as a consequence of the post-election developments in Iran.

The writer is a former Ambassador to Japan and Director, Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies.

## India's water diversion policy may turn on itself



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

THE Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna flow through Bangladesh from India until they fall into the Bay of Bengal, creating one of the biggest deltas in the world. It is estimated that 25,000 square miles within Bangladesh can be designated as delta, an area equal to Belgium and the Netherlands.

Unilateral water diversion or withdrawal of water from trans-boundary or international rivers has been the long-standing policy of India. Without any agreement with Bangladesh it has steadily embarked on constructing dam or diverting water from many trans-boundary rivers, such as Teesta, Gumti, Khowai, Dharla, Dudkumar, Monu. India had reportedly blocked streams of rivers such as Muhuri, Chagalaia, Fulchari, Kachua and many others in Tripura flowing into Bangladesh.

Since the trans-boundary rivers are within the territory of India, it did not discuss and come to agreement with Bangladesh on the blockage or diversion of use of waters of rivers, although the Indo-Bangladesh Joint River Commission exists since 1972.

On sharing of "common rivers", Article 9 of the 1996 Ganges Water Treaty obliges India to conclude "water sharing treaties/agreements" with Bangladesh "on principles of equity, fairness and no harm to either party."

Depletion of water in trans-boundary rivers in India has thrown Bangladesh in a very critical state, especially in navigation, agriculture, and way of life. Farmers, fishermen and forests are all adversely affected by depletion of water in rivers.

Bangladesh will need to increase its agricultural yield about 2% per cent per year to meet the needs of the population that will increase to 200 million by 2020. To cope with the situation, Bangladesh must rely on

surface water from rivers instead of withdrawal of ground water presently being practiced.

It is noted that increased flow of waters in Bangladesh Rivers will be of great benefit to India as well. Under an agreement with Bangladesh, India has been given permission to transport its goods through river crafts to its seven eastern states that are landlocked.

The river routes Kolkata-Chandpur-Chilmari-Dubri and Kolkata-Chandpur-Bhairab Bazar-Zakiganj-Karimganj are hardly being used by India because of lack of depth of water in the rivers. Furthermore Chittagong and Mongla ports together with adequate channel-depth of Bangladesh rivers could be utilized by both Nepal and Bhutan.

### Tipaimukh Dam

The construction of Tipaimukh dam for generating 1500MW on the trans-boundary Barak River has raised hue and cry both in Manipur state in India and in Bangladesh.

The construction of the proposed Tipaimukh dam in a geologically sensitive zone, adjacent to the well recognized Taithu Fault is a major concern. A major earthquake may cause the failure of the dam and endanger the lives, land and forest of both India and Bangladesh.

The risk of dam failure is a significant issue. A dam-break is a catastrophic failure which results in the sudden draining of the reservoir and a severe flood wave that may cause destruction and deaths downstream in Bangladesh.

It is reported that Dr. Soibam Ibotombi of the Department of Earth Sciences, Manipur University, (India), in an article, mentioned that the "Tipaimukh dam is a geo-tectonic blunder of international dimensions."

Besides being criticised for technical and environmental grounds by many experts both in India and Bangladesh, it may be

strongly argued the proposed dam is, among others, contrary to:

The 1997 UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses

Fourth preambular paragraph of the Indo-Bangladesh 1996 Ganges Water Treaty

Article 6 of the 1989 ILO Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples

The 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity.

Although India may not be a party to the 1997 Convention or 1992 Biodiversity Convention, India as a regional power may demonstrate its leadership in South Asia by complying with the globally accepted Conventions.

It is good to note that a parliamentary delegation from Bangladesh is going to visit the site, assess the impact on Bangladesh and report to parliament in due course.

### China's proposed diversion of water from the Tibetan plateau

According to an Indian Professor of Strategic Studies at Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, Brahma Chellaney, China's intensive farming needs water and it is increasingly turning its attention to water reserves of the Tibetan plateau. China is presently toying with massive inter-basin and inter-river water transfer projects.

According to a report by the same Indian writer, China attempts to redirect northward the flow of waters from the Tibetan plateau. The Tibetan plateau is the Principal Asian Watershed and source of ten major rivers.

It is roughly estimated that 10-20% of the Himalayan region is covered by glaciers while an additional area ranging from 30-40% has seasonal snow cover. Himalayan glaciers cover around 100,000 sq km and store about 12,000 cubic km of fresh water:

the most incredible water tank in the world.

Tibet water travel to eleven countries and are said to bring fresh water to over 85% of Asian population, approximately 50% of world's population. Four of the world's ten rivers the Brahmaputra, Indus, Yangtze, and Mekong have their head water on the Tibetan plateau.

South Asia is mainly concerned with Brahmaputra, Indus, Sutlej, Arun, Karnali, whose water is life line for more than one billion people living downstream. The Brahmaputra River is considered to be the highest river on earth with an average altitude of 4,000 meters. It runs 2,057 kilometres in Tibet before flowing into India, where it becomes the Brahmaputra. One of its interesting characteristics is the 'SHARP U-TURN' it takes at the proximity of Mt. Namcha Barwa (7,782 meters) near the Indian border.

Several Chinese projects in west-central Tibet have a bearing on river-water flows into India but it claims that China refuses to share information with it. Indian writer Chellaney has disclosed two Chinese projects that are likely to affect India adversely.

One is the proposed Great South-North Water Transfer project diverting Tibetan waters and the first phase for building 300 kilometres of tunnels and channels to draw water from the Jingsha, Yalong and Dadu rivers on the eastern rim of the Tibetan plateau.

The second phase of the project is more damaging because it proposes to re-route Tsangpo/Brahmaputra waters northward before it enters India.

Although Chinese government claims that the project is still at a conceptual stage, it is reported in foreign media that work of the project has already begun with the target to finish it in next five to seven years.

Now India became aware of its rights when China wants to divert waters from Tsangpo/Brahmaputra river. China is reportedly doing the same thing with India as India did with its rivers in relation to Bangladesh.

### Water-related conflicts

Fresh water is becoming scarce according to a UNESCO study. Population growth, pollution and climate change will combine to produce a drastic decline in water supply in the years ahead. Underground water is diminishing rapidly. It has been reported that across Asia, Africa and Latin America, ground water level are dropping as much as three metres a year.

The study suggests that if pollution keeps pace with population growth, the world will in effect lose 18,000 cubic kilometres by 2050: almost nine times the amount all countries will lose for use for irrigation.

The average supply of water is expected to drop by one-third within twenty years. UNESCO points out that up to 7 billion people could face water shortages by 2020 and global warming may put 50 countries with severe water shortages. South Asia is one of the regions to be adversely affected.

Water experts believe that water disputes on intra-state and inter-state level may increase in future. It is the potential interstate conflict over river-water resources that may be of greater concern.

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## Nato launches process toward new strategic concept

A July 7 seminar among Nato military, political and academic experts here began shaping a new strategic concept the alliance wants to finalize by its next summit, likely in late 2010 or early 2011, a Nato source said.

The new concept, to be drafted by 12 members of an alliance strategic concept committee, will replace the 1999 document and be taken forward by incoming Nato Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Issues such as energy security, proliferation, cyberdefense and terrorism are expected to be covered.

In his closing address at the seminar, outgoing Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said Nato can no longer function without broad political, parliamentary and public support to provide an adequate budget, and stressed that Nato must be selective and not try to do everything.

Earlier, in his opening address, he argued that Nato and the European Union must more effectively combine their complementary assets, and that the new concept should produce a policy blueprint to strengthen the Nato-EU relationship and generate the political will to make it happen.

Later, in a press conference, he said that he was not among those who believed Nato should focus only on hard power and the European Union on soft power; the union should also work at the hard end of the spectrum, he said.

He described Nato-Russia relations as one of the most delicate but important debating topics for the new concept. The Nato-Russia Council needs to become not just a body to articulate common differences but also common interests, and to keep relations on an even keel.

He also said Nato must take a more common approach when acquiring capabilities such as transport aircraft, helicopters, or intelligence or reconnaissance assets, or broaden the scope of the common funding for operations.

De Hoop Scheffer also said he hoped the new concept would finally lay to rest the notion that there is any distinction between security at home and security abroad. Article 5 can apply outside Nato territory as much as inside. Today, the challenge is not just to defend allied territory but its populations, he said, and they, unlike territory, move around.

He also argued that Nato will need to do a better job of avoiding crises and interventions where it can. In connection with that, World Food Programme Executive Director Josette Sheeran said that food security should be part of the concept.

Hunger hotspots must be identified early on, she said, because when people are cut off from food, they migrate, revolt or die. Nato could be helpful in calling for pre-emptive action, she added.

Her spokesperson, Emilia Casella, pointed to the large number of riots that have occurred in many countries in 2008 because of high food prices.

## India, Afghanistan to discuss closer cooperation

Indian and Afghan leaders will discuss this week closer cooperation in the fight against the Taliban.

Gen. Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, chief of General Staff of the Afghan National Army, is visiting here July 6-9, said sources in the Indian Defence Ministry.

"During the visit he is likely to interact with senior officials in the military and civilian defence hierarchy to discuss various contemporary issues," says an Indian Defence Ministry news release.

India has always desisted from fighting the Taliban directly inside Afghanistan under the aegis of the allied forces, insisting that it should fight only under authority of the United Nations, sources said. India has already agreed to train Afghan personnel at Indian defense establishments.

During his visit, the Afghan Army chief will meet with top Indian Army officers. Afghanistan has 10 Russian-made MI-35 helicopter gunships and is looking for training and maintenance support from India.

## German Puma order is biggest ever

Germany's government placed an order Monday for 405 Puma armored fighting vehicles from a joint venture of Rheinmetall and Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW), according to a KMW statement.

The series production order is worth about 3.1 billion euros (\$4.3 billion), and both of the German companies said it is the largest order they have ever received. The contractor is PSM GmbH, Kassel. KMW and Rheinmetall each hold a 50 percent stake in the joint venture.

The Puma, a tracked armored personnel carrier equipped with a 30mm cannon, is designed to resist land mines, rocket-propelled grenades and improvised explosive devices, and to be quickly airlifted to conflict zones. Deliveries to the German Army are scheduled to begin next year.

Source: www.defensenews.com