

# US gets tough with Iran

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

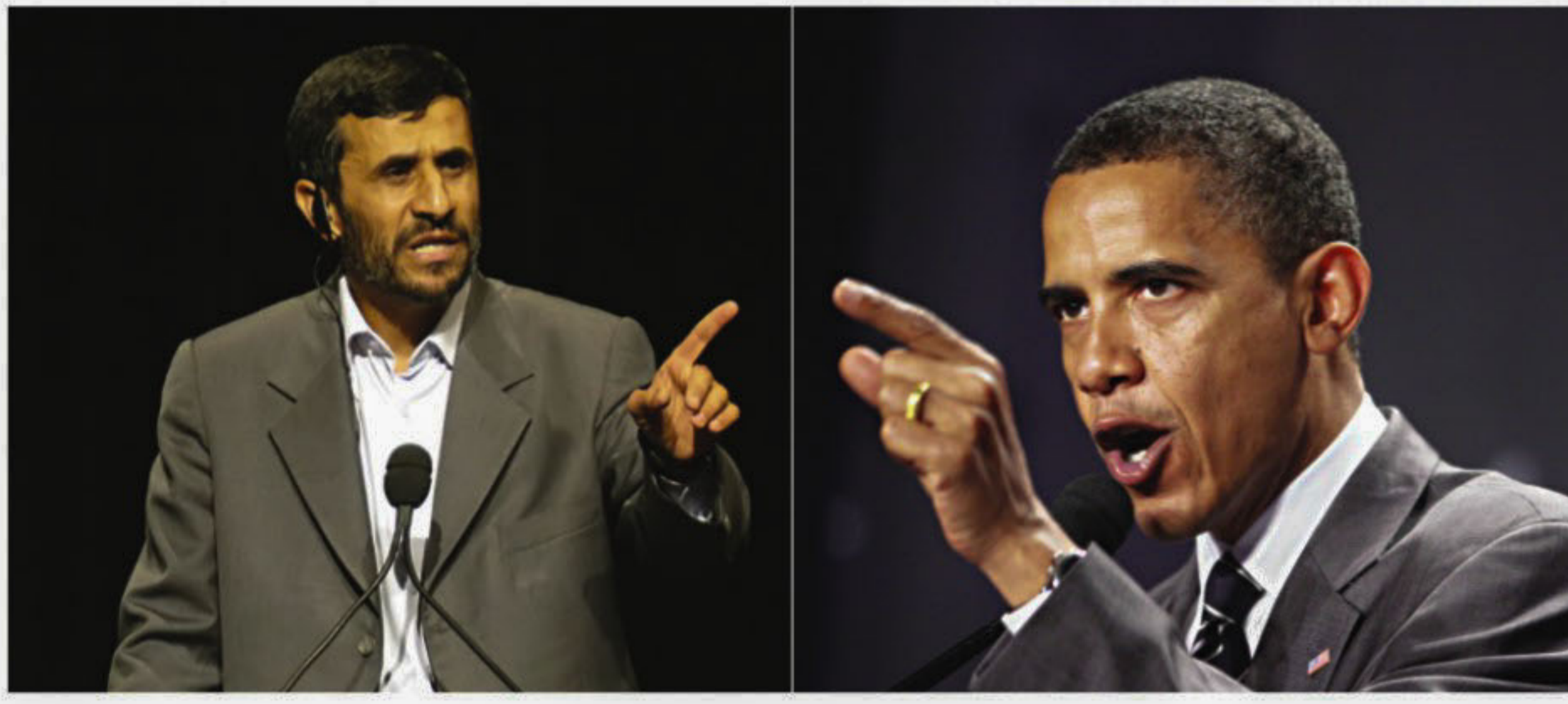
It seems that President Obama's soft approach to Iran does not work with American public. In the Cairo speech on June 4 last year, he referred to Iran by its full name, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and said Islamic countries had been victimised by colonialism as well as the Cold War era struggle between the United States and the former Soviet Union.

He pledged a "new beginning between the US and Muslims around the world." He urged America and the Islamic world to drop their suspicions of one another and forge new alliances to confront violent extremism and heal religious divides. However, one fact remains that Obama's oratory, which was so powerful in Cairo does not easily move Iran.

Undertaking reforms in America whose lawmakers are essentially centre-right is difficult. Most of them are instinctively opposed to government's intervention on social and financial issues, overtly religious and think that display of power of America is necessary to ensure freedom and democracy around the world.

The recent National Tea Party Convention outside Nashville has demonstrated the power of grassroots of America's conservative trend and Sarah Palin, the former Republican Vice Presidential candidate has become the face of anti-administration "tea party" movement. She told the crowd of 1,100 in a hotel "America is ready for another revolution", prompting the first of several standing ovations.

The unemployment rate soared to 10.2 per cent, highest in 26 years and the jump into double-digit levels of unemployment has provided a reminder that economic recession is not over. Some economists hold the view that the stimu-



The administration is accelerating the deployment of new defences against possible Iranian missile attacks in the Gulf, reportedly placing special ships off the Iranian coast and anti-missile systems in at least four Arab countries. It may be recalled that during the administration of Bush, the US wanted to strengthen Egypt's ability to "address shared strategic goals" by giving US\$13 billion worth of weapons.

lars fell far short of what was needed.

Meanwhile the Democratic base has lost much of its passion partly because of the administration's soft-touch approach to financial crisis, which seemed to many like a betrayal of their ideals.

Independent voters who had flocked to Obama last year shifted to the Republican candidates and the victory of the Republic to late Ted Kennedy's seat in the Senate in the Massachusetts is a very big political blow to the President. The

Democrats lost its majority in the Senate at a critical moment when health care bill and climate bill are to be considered this year.

The swing to the Republican Party will certainly be noted by moderate congressional Democrats facing re-election this November who may now be more reluctant to support the President on tough votes in Congress.

All these factors seem to have weighed the Obama administration to be tough on

Iran. The administration is accelerating the deployment of new defences against possible Iranian missile attacks in the Gulf, reportedly placing special ships off the Iranian coast and anti-missile systems in at least four Arab countries (such as Qatar, UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait). Saudi Arabia already has similar equipment of its own.

It may be recalled that during the administration of Bush, the US wanted to strengthen Egypt's ability to "address

shared strategic goals" by giving US\$13 billion worth of weapons. The goal is to contain influence of Iran and Syria in the Middle East and to lobby for Israel among Arab States to soften their attitude towards Israel.

Saudi Arabia and five other Arab countries bought more than US\$15 billion worth of advanced weapons from the US as a counterweight to Iran and Syria during the past two years.

The President spoke of the shift in his State of Union address, warning of "consequences" if Iran continued to defy the UN demands to manufacture nuclear weapons. This strategy is aimed at the following:

- To increase pressure on Iran
- To avoid a sharp weapons from Iran because of the defensive nature of build up
- To show to Israel that there is no need for action for them

Iran has ignored UN Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions over its refusal to suspend enrichment in exchange for trade benefits, or grant unfettered IAEA inspections meant to verify it has no clandestine nuclear arms programme.

Last October, the West came up with a new proposal that Iran should ship the low-enriched uranium (about 1.200 kilograms) out of the country to the West or Russia for additional processing and eventual return in Iran as fuel rods for a civilian reactor.

Although on 3rd February, Iran's president has said it is ready to send its enriched uranium abroad for further enrichment under a deal to ease concerns about its nuclear programme, deep suspicions remain with the US and allies on Iran's offer. Meanwhile on 7th February, Iran's President directed Iran's nuclear

agency to enrich uranium up to 20%.

Against the background, the US is reportedly going ahead with a proposal of new sanctions against Iran. Furthermore, on 4th February, Romania has agreed to host missile interceptors as part of a new US defence shield. The US scrapped a previous missile shield, based in Poland and the Czech Republic, which had infuriated Russia. Instead the new system would provide better defence from "the emerging threat" of Iranian short- and medium-range missiles, a US official said.

The US administration's tough policy on Iran by imposing new sanctions has become complicated by its arms sales to Taiwan as announced on 29th January.

Observers say China has been angry about the decision and could reject new UN sanctions on Iran. Hours before the announcement on Taiwan, the United States urged Beijing to help curb Iran's nuclear program. Observers believe that cooperation between China and the US on key international and regional issues will also inevitably be affected.

China's increased clout is felt at a time when its economy looks set to overhaul Japan's and its military budget is surging year by year. China has become more assertive in world affairs and the US cannot expect that after arms sale to Taiwan it will be business as usual with China.

Observers say that President Obama is in a bind. To be tough on Iran is popular with American public, but the global order has shifted in favour of China and the US cannot force China to go along with it. That is the reality in global power politics.

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

## McHale sees positive side of Islam in Bangladesh

M. SERAJUL ISLAM

Ms. Judith A. McHale, US Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs, who was recently in Dhaka, is the senior most ranking US Government official to visit Bangladesh since President Obama took office in USA and Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh. During her public engagements, she made some remarks that are very encouraging for Bangladesh. In Dhaka University she said that US would take 20,000 students every year from Bangladesh where at the moment, the intake is far fewer.

The Under Secretary made more encouraging remarks when she addressed Madrassah students of Uttar Badda Islamia Kamil Madrassah. When a student informed her that Madrassah educated students are seldom given US visa for education, she said categorically that US doors are open to Madrassah educated students of Bangladesh. She also said that the US Embassy is providing teachers for teaching English in Madrassahs and her Government "is proud to be working with the Madrassah." She also said that religious leadership is a key to the success of socio-economic development efforts. Her most positive remark was her belief that Bangladesh could assist the US to bridge its gap with the Muslim world.

The Under Secretary however did not say how many Madrassah students who would be given visa annually as she did for the general students. This notwithstanding, the fact that a senior Obama administration official has publicly made positive remarks for the Madrassah educated students and role of Islam in society is very significant. Her statement came on the back of a number of other initiatives that the US Government has taken in Bangladesh to work with the Madrassahs. The US Government is working with a number of NGOs to sensitize Madrassah students on democracy, information and communication technology, etc.

This is a significant change in US stance on Bangladesh. Not very long ago, the US Ambassador to Bangladesh Harry Thomas was crying hoarse about religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh; that was dismissed by the BNP Government. The Awami League went overboard to spread the news that Bangladesh was seething with religious fundamentalism, even labeling the BNP Government as "Taliban". Early in 2006, the US Assistant Secretary for South Asia, Ms. Christina Rocco, on an official visit to Bangladesh, strongly advised the Government that it had no choice but to rein in the religious fundamentalists, that later led to the arrests of Bangla Bhai and the JMB terrorists. The BNP Government arrested religious terrorists in a make believe manner that was a far cry from the dangerous portrayal about them in the media and by the opposition, when they were at the height of their criminal activities.

The meekness of their surrender and their execution under the Caretaker Government without any repercussion from their cadres who were supposed to be on the verge of capturing power by force left no doubt that the case of religious extremists in Bangladesh was over politicised and overstated. They raised their

ugly face in no uncertain terms because the BNP Government indulged and encouraged them. The national elections in December 2008, in which over 20 million first time voters entered the election process further sealed the nation's contempt for political parties in Bangladesh that use religion for achieving their ends. In fact, even the BNP found the religion based parties a political liability in the last elections when the biggest of the religion based parties in Bangladesh, the Jamat-e-Islami could manage just 2 seats.

Although the parties that have used religion for politics have been historically rejected by voters in Bangladesh, interestingly Islam as a religion has made significant inroads into the lives of the overwhelming majority of its people since independence. There are many reasons for this that is outside the scope of this writing. This spread of Islam, unlike in many other countries, is still tampered by liberal traditions embedded in the history of the religion in this part of the world where Sufism has played a major role. Nevertheless, the resurgence of Islam in Bangladesh also faces the dangers of evolving in the opposition direction. It is an issue that must be dealt with the utmost caution to deter Bangladesh from following Algeria or Afghanistan.

Soon after the Awami League came to power early last year, a vested group was busy spreading distorted information to create public opinion against the Qoami Madrasahs (QM) and calling for restoration of secularism by removing Islam from public life. A World Bank Report later trashed the propaganda against QM, one that suggested that under BNP Government 35% soldiers recruited were from QM. There was a period of lull in the campaign of this group against Islam based political parties and the Madrasahs after the WB report, although the report may not have been alone responsible for the lull. The annulment of the fifth amendment of the constitution, the war trial criminals that would involve mostly the Jamat; and the recent activities of Jamat's student cadre in the universities have re-activated the move. A section is claiming the restoration of the 1972 constitution to ban the Jamat.

Ms Judith McHale's visit is very significant in the present context of Bangladesh's politics. Unlike Ms Christina Rocco's visit in early 2006, she did not sound any alarm bells for Bangladesh on the issue of religious fundamentalism. To the contrary, her visit to the Madrassah, together with the initiatives of her Government to work with the Madrasahs of Bangladesh by providing them with modern educational tools are positive signs that US is not worried about 'religious fundamentalism' in Bangladesh and that it even visualises a role for Bangladesh to help it reach out more towards the Muslim world. Some months ago, the US Government dropped the name of Bangladesh from the watch list of countries where religious freedom is at stake. This is another indication that religious fundamentalism in Bangladesh is on the decline in US perception

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

## Indian defense chief urges public-private industry cooperation

In his inaugural address at Defexpo 2010, Indian Defence Minister A. K. Antony called for better cooperation between private and state-owned defense companies.

"We want the public sector and the private sector to work in close cooperation, as friendly partners," Antony said Feb. 15. "Our defense industry is open up to 100 percent for the private sector, while foreign direct investment is allowed up to 26 percent."

India's annual defense expenditure of about \$30 billion will increase in proportion relative to the overall economy, which is expected to grow 8 percent to 10 percent annually for the next two decades, he added.

The biannual exhibition of land and naval systems is being held in New Delhi from Feb. 15-18. Thirty-five countries are showcasing their weaponry and equipment.

"Expenditure on defense in absolute terms is bound to increase in equal proportion. I am sure this will present the defense industry new and challenging opportunities to make a more meaningful contribution to the defense sector," Antony said.

The Indian Defence Ministry is drawing a long-term road map for defense requirements and capabilities. "We will soon publish the 'Technology Perspective and Capability Roadmap,' covering a period of 15

years, to share the future needs of our armed forces," Antony said.

It is estimated that India will need to spend about \$100 billion in the next 15 years to bolster its armed forces. About 50 percent of India's weapons and equipment, bought mostly from the former Soviet Union, is obsolete, an Indian Defence Ministry official said.

Defense planners would like to increase participation by the domestic sector as India currently imports up to 70 percent of its weapons and equipment. The Defence Ministry periodically reviews its procurement policy through a process called Defence Procurement Procedures.

"We have made our Defence

Procurement Procedures transparent and [worked] to speed up the defense acquisition process. The recent introduction of the 'Buy & Make [Indian]' category in the Defence Procurement Procedures aims at encouraging the Indian private industry to form joint ventures with any foreign manufacturer," Antony said.

India's procurement process often is marked by delays because of the Defence Ministry bureaucracy, viewed as the biggest stumbling block in procuring essential weapons, a senior Indian Air Force official said.

Source: www.defensenews.com

## Sister ships perform awesome double act

The Royal Navy's two newest warships formidable air defense destroyers HMS Daring and HMS Dauntless have performed side-by-side at sea for the first time.

The Type 45 destroyers successfully completed a series of complex manoeuvres south of the Isle of Wight on February 15.

The pair sailed at high speeds to simulate the defence of a high-value warship and also put their communications equipment to the test as a warm-up to intensive operational sea training later this year.

Captain Richard Powell, HMS Dauntless' Commanding Officer, said: "Today marks a significant step forward in the development of the Type 45 class. Conducting joint trials in this way will further enhance the potential capability of the Type 45. It also marks an important step in the delivery of the 21st century Navy."

"We have been able to build on the successes of HMS Daring over the last year and in HMS Dauntless we are

delivering a warship that the Royal Navy and the nation will be really proud of."

Commander in Chief Fleet, Admiral Sir Trevor Soar, who was embarked in HMS Dauntless witnessing the historic moment said: "I'm really positive about these ships. I have seen them from the very beginning, through the design and planning to the trials."

"It is very much like watching the children growing up. They have been great kids and now they are growing up to be great adults."

The Portsmouth-based ships will work together for two further days before going their separate ways and continuing their respective trials programmes.

HMS Daring was commissioned into the RN last July and is due to formally enter service later this year.

Meanwhile HMS Dauntless will be commissioned in June and is expected to enter operational service in 2011.

Source: www.defencetalk.com



## Indo-Nepal relations: Transitional phase, testing times

Indian External Affairs Minister SM Krishna's visit to Nepal in January 2010 has come at a very crucial time. First, Nepal is in the last leg of the transitional phase as the May 2010 deadline approaches to submit the written constitution. This means the process of integration and rehabilitation of the Maoist combatants should also be completed by that time. While the written constitution would address the issues for which the insurgency was waged, the second would dismantle the infrastructure built to wage the insurgency. Normalcy should then return to Nepal.

Unfortunately, there is slow progress on both these issues and there is danger that deadlines may be missed. The fractured nature of consensus politics seen in 2009 threatens more than just the peace process in Nepal. It has the potential to hit at the democratic principles too, especially the civilian supremacy over the military unless corrective measures are immediately taken. Second, the fourth phase of UCPN(M) protest movement for civilian supremacy which began during the last week of December 2009 directly and indirectly targets India. Both the above developments are not in India's interests. In the post 2008 CA elections phase, Indo-Nepal relations have been defined to a great extent by the divisive politics within Nepal. What does mean to the stability within Nepal, Indo-Nepal relations and the regional security? Can India and the various political parties within Nepal revisit the flawed assumptions under

which the relations are being conducted during this crucial transitional phase.

Source: IPCS, New Delhi

## After suspension, HIMARS OK'd for Afghanistan use

The U.S. Army has cleared the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) for use in Afghanistan, one day after two HIMARS rockets killed civilians in Marjah.

Officials with the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) suspended the use of HIMARS on Feb. 14, while they reviewed the incident. The ban was lifted after they determined the system was not at fault, said U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Sabrina Foster, a spokeswoman for ISAF. "The review into the incident is ongoing, but it has been determined that the HIMARS system was not to blame," Foster said in an e-mail. "Use of the HIMARS system has been reinstated for defense purposes in accordance with the tactical directive and standard use of engagement rules."

According to a Feb. 14 press release, the two rockets were intended to hit a compound "where insurgents were delivering accurate, direct fire on an Afghan-ISAF joint team." Instead, the rockets landed "approximately 300 meters off their intended target, killing 12 civilians in Nad Ali district, Helmand Province," the NATO statement said.

Source: www.defensenews.com