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Resolving the Iranian nuclear standoff

TALKS, NOT WAR



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Editor's Note

THE spectre of another Middle East war continues to grow as Israel and the West ratchet up the pressure on Iran, accusing it of working towards building a nuclear bomb. Leading the charge is Israel, the sole nuclear power in the Middle East, which has clearly declared it cannot coexist with a nuclear Iran. Its barely veiled threats to carry out a repeat of its 1981 bombing of Iraq's nuclear reactor in Osirak have been coupled with a wave of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, all of which have served only to heighten tension.

The issue has taken on a sharp focus since the release in November by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of its latest report on Iran. While the report is anything but a model of objectivity, it is hardly conclusive. But predictably, Israel has been quick to distort its findings (with the willing assistance of the Western media) to suggest that the world faces a clear and present danger from a nuclear Iran.

While the kneejerk reaction of support for the Israeli view from the United States was only to be expected (especially in an election year), what was particularly surprising was the indecent haste with which the European Union leaders have responded against Iran. The regime of tighter economic sanctions, including a ban on the import of Iranian oil, which the EU leaders have agreed to impose has only further inflamed the crisis.

There is no justification for such punitive action against Iran. The IAEA report does not offer any credible evidence that Iran, whatever its record in the past, is currently embarking on a nuclear *weapons* programme. The report focuses on Iran's pre-2003 nuclear weapons activities, on which, as the report acknowledges, Iran has come clean with its 2003-06 submissions to the Agency of the essential information and declarations on these activities.

However, it appears that these very admissions, instead of being welcomed, have become a basis for continuing suspicion as to whether Iran is still clandestinely carrying on a nuclear weapons programme. Basing itself *largely* on Western intelligence reports and on Iran's failure to report 'in a timely manner' its construction of a number of recent nuclear plants and its possession of enrichment technology, the Agency appears to harbour 'serious concerns' that 'some [of the pre-2003] activities may still be ongoing'.

By relying so heavily on Western intelligence, much of which has in the past proved to be false and self-serving, the IAEA stands in danger of undermining its own integrity as a truly independent United Nations body. Further, it is questionable whether it is fair to impugn the credibility of the current conduct of a member state by reference to its past admissions of transgressions of treaty obligations. If the price of candid admissions of past misconduct is continuing suspicion, only a foolhardy nation would be prepared to make such admissions.

To be sure, the regime in Tehran has not always conducted itself in such a way as to generate confidence within the international community. Its latest display of nuclear prowess in the midst of the current tense situation is hardly likely to assuage fears of its long-term aims.

However, it is important to take note that when US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta was asked on a CBS News programme in January whether the Iranians were 'trying to develop a nuclear weapon', his answer was an unequivocal 'No'. The more recent admission by the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, in his CNN interview with Fareed Zakaria, that it is the US view that Iran 'has not decided' to build atomic armaments, is also instructive. Presumably, both these high officials must be speaking on the basis of the latest US intelligence reports to which they have access. In light of this, what credence can we give to the IAEA's alarming conclusions or to Israel's claim that Iran presents a clear and imminent danger?

In the final analysis, the only way to ensure that there will be no state aspiring to membership of the exclusive nuclear club to which many of the leading Western nations and Israel belong is a nuclear-free world as envisaged by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). But there is no evidence that Western nations are prepared to undertake the necessary disarmament moves to realise this global goal or, for that matter, even a limited regional goal such as a nuclear-free Middle East. As for Israel, it is not even a signatory to the NPT and has refused to allow any nuclear inspections. In contrast, Iran is a signatory of the Treaty and is at least prepared to permit such inspections.

While there is no credible evidence that Iran has embarked on a nuclear weapons programme, the danger is that, by continuing to threaten and isolate it, Israel and the West may well force Iran to exercise such an option. At some point, the unending pressure may well force the current regime to come to the conclusion that its very survival is contingent on the possession of nuclear weapons. One can only hope that policymakers in the West will come to their senses and make real efforts at a dialogue with Iran. The sooner, the better for peace in the Middle East and the world at large.

Our cover story for this issue spotlights the developing crisis over Iran's nuclear programme. In addition to an analysis of the latest IAEA report, we also provide informed commentaries on various aspects of the crisis. All this, hopefully, will add to the voices of sanity and reason so essential to overcoming the growing hysteria on this explosive issue.

— The Editors

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Tension is continuing to mount as Israel and the West step up political and economic pressure on Iran over its nuclear programme. With little or no evidence to back up claims that Iran is building nuclear weapons, there is growing concern that a new, wholly unjustified war may be launched in the Middle East. (Picture shows an anti-war demonstration in the US.) **18**

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WHO under siege from private sector

Reflecting on the growing public concern about the World Health Organisation's linkages with the corporate world, *Tom Fawthrop* wonders whether world health policy is in danger of falling into the clutches of the unelected gnomes of Davos.

IT was symbolic of the crisis facing the United Nations' World Health Organisation that billionaire Bill Gates, the Chairman of Microsoft, was the special guest speaker addressing last year's World Health Assembly (WHA) of WHO member states.

This followed from Gates' previous address at the 2005 edition of the WHA. Commenting on the then unprecedented invitation extended to Gates to deliver a keynote speech at the WHA, the People's Health Movement (PHM) viewed it as 'part of an alarming trend of various UN organisations, including WHO, kowtowing to global multinational corporations under the guise of the "Global Compact" and so-called "Public-Private Partnerships"'.

'It is time to either declare Microsoft a WHO member country, or stop the shameful promotion of global corporations at important UN meetings,' said a PHM spokesperson.

The membership of the PHM is made up of doctors, public health specialists and health activists committed to the principles of free universal health systems.

While Gates was ostensibly invited to the 2011 WHA in his capacity as co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, activist groups say that the line dividing his philanthropy from his links to pharmaceutical interests and his company's business strategy is very thin.

Many corporate giants have been adopted by WHO since 2010, as private sector partners working together for 'better global health'.

The origins of this public-private



Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates delivering the keynote address at WHO's 2011 World Health Assembly. WHO has increasingly been promoting public-private partnerships, at the potential expense of public health interests.

sector partnership process can be traced to WHO's chronic funding problems. Over 80% of its budget is based on emergency services and voluntary contributions, as opposed to compulsory financial commitments from member states.¹

Hence, in the WHO search for extra resources, the private sector came up with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The private-sector-funded Global Fund has emerged as a new player on the increasingly fragmented field of world health alongside the World Bank, the Gates Foundation, and other charities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Australian health researcher David Legge points out: 'The reform

proposals that [WHO Director-General] Margaret Chan took to the WHA in 2011 had clearly been discussed in advance with Bill Gates. They came up with a package that included an evaluation of WHO and a proposal for a "World Health Forum" to include drug companies, the development banks, and big foundations.'

Naturally Chan needed to reassure member states that WHO, in 'the interest of safeguarding public health', was 'not afraid to speak out against entities that are far richer, more powerful, and better connected politically than health will ever be', adding that 'we need to maintain vigilance against any real or perceived conflicts of interest'.

But the question is: have her actions in promoting public-private partnerships been at odds with her speeches on defending the basic mandate of WHO to promote the public health interest on the global stage?

Whatever the role of the Director-General, the private sector package presented by Chan has raised much concern among member states.

There is little doubt that Chan understands to some degree the conflict of interest posed by private sector forces ranged against the WHO commitment to public health systems, in contrast to their promotion of privatised healthcare. The principle of partnership with the private sector has created a dangerous blurring between dedication to public health on one side, and the ambivalent role of philanthropy and the private sector on the other. In the case of the private sector Chan seems to think that it can be

wooded away from its role in profiting from global health problems and made to share the burden of funding solutions.

Nowhere was this contradiction more evident than at the UN General Assembly special meeting on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) held in New York in September.

The problems arising from WHO sharing the same bed with private corporations became very obvious during the meeting. That's because non-communicable diseases – such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and emphysema – are deeply entangled with important global industries, not only tobacco but also food, pharmaceuticals, advertising, transportation and construction. And NCDs are the planet's biggest health problem, responsible for 63% of all deaths each year, with incidence growing steeply in the rapidly urbanising low-income nations of the world.

A *Washington Post* report queried: 'What is the responsibility of rich countries, and the pharmaceutical companies located in them, to improve medical care in poor countries, where 40% of deaths from non-communicable diseases occur before age 60?'

At a UN meeting in June billed as an opportunity for charities, NGOs and the public to voice their views on the outcome document of the September NCD summit, the tabled speakers included representatives of the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations, the International Food and Beverage Alliance, and the World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry.

Among those attending the September meeting itself on behalf of 'civil society' were industry representatives, according to the *BMJ* (*British Medical Journal*). The journal also reported that GlaxoSmithKline, Sanofi-Aventis and the Global Alcohol Consumers Group were included within the official US delegation. And one well-attended breakfast for conference delegates was hosted by PepsiCo.

Over 100 NGOs and medical

groups signed a petition in July saying that there needed to be a code of conduct with industry, as there was a 'lack of clarity of roles for the industry sector in UN health policy setting and shaping'.

'Our position is that partnership isn't the right word. It implies trust and respect,' said Patti Rundall, who has helped run the campaign against the marketing of baby formula for the last 30 years. 'The allegiance of the food companies is to create profits. Their voluntary commitments are only good for as long as they want to keep them,' she said.

The Davos-inspired assault on WHO

During the 1980s the World Bank effectively sidelined WHO as the primary influence on health policies of governments of the South. The Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) imposed major cuts to public health services. At the same time privatisation of healthcare was assiduously promoted.

Today key areas of public health and policymaking across the globe such as prevention of disease, strengthening public health systems and primary healthcare – the key terrain of WHO and the responsibilities of member states – are being coveted by private interest groups led by the new 'rulers of the world' known as the World Economic Forum.

It is all part of the WEF's Global Redesign Initiative to rebuild institutions and mechanisms of global governance, according to Garance Upham, a researcher on health issues.

Upham, who delivered a lecture at the International Association of Health Policy – Europe conference held in Ankara, Turkey last year, explained that the WEF advocates a new governance paradigm for dealing with global health issues which requires a drastic reform of WHO.

The WEF, which holds its high-profile annual meetings in Davos, Switzerland, argues that 'The model of development characterised by donors and recipients is dead ... In place we need to think about collective re-

sponsibility. A world where an increasing number of stakeholders should have a role in shaping and making policy is a given. Governance does not equal governments alone.'

Today key areas of public health and policymaking across the globe are being coveted by private interest groups.

Indeed WHO and public health is not only about governments. Other stakeholders are doctors, nurses, patients and communities, but these stakeholders are missing or marginalised in the Davos blueprint. The Davos-distorted definition of 'stakeholders' is clearly set out in the proposal to establish a World Health Forum, perhaps modelled on their very own WEF.

The Davos group is advocating that private donors to global health campaigns should enjoy more or less equal seating alongside WHO in formulating policymaking and supervising global health initiatives. All this is coming at a time of growing economic crisis, with many governments only too eager to cut back on health budgets and their contributions to WHO.

It perhaps comes as no surprise that, along with Tony Blair and Kofi Annan, Peter Brabeck, a former CEO and current Chairman of Nestle, is a board member of the WEF.

Upham argues that all this would downgrade WHO from its vital role in intervening to control epidemics, supervising international health standards and promoting primary healthcare, to a more humble role mediating between major donors to the Global Fund, private medical charities like the Gates Foundation and even certain drug companies.

Within this paradigm, 'health is an area in which entrepreneurship can

flourish', according to a write-up on the WEF website. 'It is the mission of the Forum's Health team to galvanise business to take action in global health.'

A response to this comes from public health academic A Shukla, who writes: 'Private involvement carries large overhead costs and simply needs to deliver some form of profit. There is thus simply an insurmountable gap between public interest and private privilege. Only through putting pressure on the state will the excesses of the private sector in health be eventually done away with.'

It is clear that public-private partnerships are a dangerous path for any vulnerable UN agency to go down. A coalition of conflicting interests usually results in one partner swallowing the other or bullying it into submission.

A fundamental issue is at stake here: whether our world health policy is in the hands of health professionals, health ministries and grassroots NGOs, or falls into the clutches of the unelected gnomes of Davos and their business blueprints for ever greater control over the vital sector of public health. ◆

Tom Fawthrop is a journalist and filmmaker who attended the first People's Health Assembly – the founding conference of the People's Health Movement – in 2000 and also participated in the second People's Health Assembly in 2005. He is the director of Swimming Against the Tide, a documentary on the Cuban health system. DVDs are available from Eurekafilmsdocos@gmail.com.

Endnote

1. Some UN agencies such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP) receive compulsory contributions from member states. But in the case of WHO, its fixed contributions have been whittled down and it is now increasingly dependent on voluntary contributions. See Delhi Statement, 'Time to Untie the Knots: The WHO Reform and the Need for Democratising Global Health', May 2011, available via www.medico.de/en/themes/health/documents/time-to-untie-the-knots-the-who-reform-and-the-need-for-democratizing-global-health/1177.

Reaffirming the Environment-Development Nexus of UNCED 1992

Martin Khor

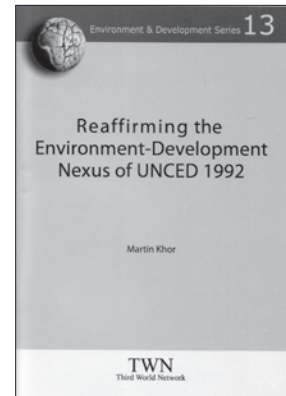
The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) ended with mixed feelings of euphoria, deep disappointment, concern about the future, and stirrings of hope.

Many of the Agenda 21 actions were not new but it was significant to collate together a comprehensive range of environment and development issues, put action programmes to them, and attach cost estimates for their implementation. Government leaders morally committed themselves to implement the agreed measures. In addition a finely balanced set of environmental obligations and development rights was achieved in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

Implementation was estimated at US\$600 billion for the South alone, of which the external aid component was US\$125 billion. The South regained a high-profile place on the international agenda for development assistance and technology transfer. However, as the Earth Summit ended, there were doubts that the promises would be fulfilled. Today it is undeniable that the North has failed to deliver on the means of implementation: finance and technology.

Nevertheless UNCED saw the first global discourse on the environment-development nexus in the context of North-South relations.

In the current debate on "a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication", one of the two themes of the 2012 UN



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Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), there are concerns that lack of clarity and common understanding of the term "green economy" risks the substitution of the framework of sustainable development adopted at UNCED and a marginalisation of the social and economic dimensions. This booklet provides an account of the evolution of the UNCED approach to this nexus, and recalls the necessity of the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

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Reshaping dysfunctional food systems

A new report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has drawn attention to the need to reshape the current food systems to meet the twin challenges of global hunger and malnutrition. *Kanaga Raja* summarises its findings and recommendations.

THE current food systems are deeply dysfunctional, with the world paying an exorbitant price for the failure to consider the health impacts in designing food systems, and a change of course is needed as a matter of urgency, a United Nations Special Rapporteur has recommended.

This is the main conclusion of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food in his report to the 19th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council, due to take place on 27 February-23 March.

In his report, Olivier De Schutter noted that in OECD countries (rich member states of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) in particular, where farm subsidies remain at high levels, the current system is one in which taxpayers pay three times for a system that is a recipe for unhealthy lives.

'Taxpayers pay for misguided subsidies that encourage the agrifood industry to sell heavily processed foods at the expense of making fruits and vegetables available at lower prices; they pay for the marketing efforts of the same industry to sell unhealthy foods, which are deducted from taxable profits; and they pay for health-care systems for which non-communicable diseases today represent an unsustainable burden,' he said.

In developing countries, he added, the main burdens remain under-nutrition and micro-nutrient deficiency, but these countries, too, are victims of these failed policies. They are witnessing a rapid shift to processed foods, which are often imported, and the abandonment by the local population of traditional diets. This shift has reduced the opportunities for local farmers to live decently from farming.



'The right to food... is an inclusive right to an adequate diet providing all the nutritional elements an individual requires to live a healthy and active life, and the means to access them.'

'Combating the different faces of malnutrition requires adopting a life-course approach guaranteeing the right to adequate diets for all, and reforming agricultural and food policies, including taxation, in order to reshape food systems for the promotion of sustainable diets. Strong political will, a sustained effort across a number of years, and collaboration across different sectors, including agriculture, finance, health, education and trade, are necessary for such a transition.'

According to the Special Rapporteur's report, 'The right to food cannot be reduced to a right not to starve. It is an inclusive right to an adequate diet providing all the nutritional elements an individual requires to live a healthy and active life, and the means to access them. States have a duty to protect the right to an adequate diet, in particular by regulating the food system, and to fulfil the right to adequate food by proactively strengthening people's access to resources,

allowing them to have adequate diets.'

Agrifood companies also have a responsibility to respect the right to adequate food. They must avoid infringing upon this right, and seek to prevent any adverse impact their activities might have on the enjoyment of this right. And the United Nations system itself must ensure that nutrition is taken into account in all relevant policy areas, the report adds.

The report, prepared through a range of expert meetings and consultations, says that since the 1960s, food security has been linked largely to production, while the links to nutrition were often neglected. Hunger and malnutrition were equated with a lack of calorie intake.

In the face of widespread global hunger, this focus was perhaps understandable, says the Special Rapporteur. But this prompted an overemphasis on increasing agricultural outputs and lowering food prices, while scant attention was paid to ensuring the

availability of and accessibility to a wide range of diverse foods containing the micro-nutrients necessary for the full physical and mental development of children, and for adults to lead healthy and productive lives.

‘In other words, because addressing protein-calorie malnutrition was seen as the major challenge, the requirement of dietary adequacy was neglected. In addition, beyond making foodstuffs available at low prices, the other functions of agriculture – to ensure decent incomes to food producers and to maintain the ecosystems – were not considered.’

This is changing, the report notes, pointing out that experts now agree that food systems must ensure the access of all to ‘sustainable diets’, defined as ‘diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimising natural and human resources.’

This definition recognises the need to gear agrifood systems away from an exclusive focus on boosting production and towards integrating the requirements of the adequacy of diets, social equity and environmental sustainability. All these components are essential to achieving durable success in combating hunger and malnutrition, as emphasised by the Special Rapporteur in past reports.

Challenges of malnutrition

According to the report, the world is now paying a high price for having focused almost exclusively on increasing production over the past half-century. Under-nutrition remains considerable, largely because agrifood systems have not contributed to the alleviation of rural poverty. One in seven people on a global level are still hungry. About 34% of children in developing countries, 186 million children in total, have a low height for age, the most common symptom of chronic

under-nutrition.

Additionally, a large number of people (with children and women being affected disproportionately) suffer from micro-nutrient deficiencies. Vitamin A deficiency affects at least 100 million children, limiting their growth, weakening their immunity and, in cases of acute deficiency, leading to blindness and to increased mortality. Between four billion and five billion people suffer from iron deficiency, including half of the pregnant women and children under 5 in developing countries, and an estimated two billion are anaemic.

Like under-nutrition, the Special Rapporteur stresses, micro-nutrient deficiency or ‘hidden hunger’ is a violation of a child’s right to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical and mental development, and to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, recognised under Article 6, paragraph 2, and Article 24, paragraph 2 (c), of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The report highlights that an additional nutritional challenge concerns people whose caloric intakes exceed their needs. Today, more than one billion people worldwide are overweight (with a bodily mass index – BMI >25) and at least 300 million are obese (BMI >30).

Overweight and obesity cause, worldwide, 2.8 million deaths, so that today 65% of the world’s population live in a country (all high-income countries and most middle-income countries) where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight. In a country such as the United States of America, this means that today’s children could have shorter life expectancies than their parents.

But obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) linked, in particular, to unhealthy diets are no longer limited to rich countries. It is estimated that by 2030, 5.1 million people will die annually before the age of 60 from such diseases in poor countries, up from 3.8 million today.

Obesity and overweight affect 50% or more of the population in 19 of the 34 OECD countries, but they

have become public health challenges in all regions. Death and disease from NCDs now outstrip communicable diseases in every region except Africa, and it is expected that NCD deaths will increase globally by 15% between 2010 and 2020 – and by over 20% in Africa, South-East Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Moreover, NCDs are more rapidly fatal in poorer countries. In both South-East Asia and Africa, 41% of deaths caused by high BMI occur under age 60, compared with 18% in high-income countries.

An important time lag exists between the onset of obesity and the increase in health-care costs, but it has been estimated for instance that the costs linked to overweight and obesity in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in 2015 could increase by as much as 70% relative to 2007 and could be 2.4 times higher in 2025. In countries such as India or China, the impact of obesity and diabetes is predicted to surge in the next few years. On average, a 10% increase in NCDs results in a loss of 0.5% of gross domestic product (GDP).

The Special Rapporteur finds that the fight against NCDs is underfunded, in part, because it was not included in the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000. Less than 3% of development assistance for health goes to combating NCDs, even though they cause more than one-third of all premature deaths. The poorest segments of the population are affected disproportionately. Annually, 100 million people are pushed into poverty because they cannot afford the necessary health services. In India, for example, treatment for diabetes costs an affected person on average 15-25% of household earnings, and cardiovascular disease leads to catastrophic expenditure for 25% of Indian families and drives 10% of families into poverty.

‘The agrifood systems must be reshaped to address these challenges of malnutrition – under-nutrition, micro-nutrient deficiency, and over-nutrition – not in isolation, but concurrently,’ the report recommends.

‘Ensuring adequate availability of and accessibility to fruits and vegetables and diets that are sufficiently diverse and balanced across food groups requires the rebuilding of agrifood systems. This means prioritising access to adequate diets that are socially and environmentally sustainable over the mere provision of cheap calories. Any intervention seeking to address the diverse forms of malnutrition described above should be assessed against the requirement that it favour, and does not create obstacles to, such a re-prioritisation.’

On a positive note, the report notes that a number of recent efforts have sought to address micro-nutrient deficiency, moving beyond the classic focus on low calorie intake.

For instance, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) launched in 2006 the Ending Child Hunger and Under-nutrition Initiative. In 2008, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF launched the Renewed Efforts against Child Hunger and Under-nutrition (REACH) initiative, which aims to scale up interventions addressing child under-nutrition through the co-ordinated action of UN agencies, civil society, donors and the private sector, under country-led plans.

The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) multi-stakeholder initiative, which was launched in 2009 and has gained momentum since the presentation of the SUN Framework in April 2010, seeks to promote targeted action and investment to improve nutrition for mothers and children in the 1,000-day period from pregnancy to age 2, when better nutrition can have a life-changing impact on a child’s future.

The Special Rapporteur said that it is troubling that the 1981 International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions remain under-enforced, despite the wide recognition that exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding, combined with safe and adequate complementary foods, up to 2 years

old or beyond is the optimal way of feeding infants, and reduces the risk of obesity and NCDs later in life.

‘Countries committed to scaling up nutrition should begin by regulating the marketing of commercial infant formula and other breast-milk substitutes, in accordance with WHA resolution 63.23, and by implementing the full set of WHO recommendations on the marketing of breast-milk substitutes and of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children, in accordance with WHA resolution 63.14.’

The Special Rapporteur stresses that nutrition initiatives can be strengthened by adopting a human-rights-based approach (accountability, participation and non-discrimination) and by being integrated into broader national strategies for the realisation of the right to food. Such an approach will increase effectiveness and the ability to contribute to sustainable, long-term solutions.

Agricultural imbalance

The report also draws attention to the fact that agricultural production has risen dramatically over the past 40 years, the combined result of crop breeding, intensive fertiliser use, the mechanisation of production on large plantations in new cultivated areas and, in countries that could afford it, subsidies supporting farmers and intense research and development efforts.

‘But there was an imbalance in this development. Some basic cereals and soybean were promoted, and the subsidies they benefited from were partly responsible for overproduction and over-consumption. In comparison, too little was done to improve the availability and affordability of pulses such as lentils or pigeon peas, or of fruits and vegetables, for instance by reducing post-harvest losses and improving marketing through better transport infrastructure connecting farmers to consumers.’

Between 1961 and 2009, while fruit and vegetable production increased 332%, world oilseed produc-

tion increased by 610% and meat production increased 372%. This was associated with shifting diets.

Over roughly the same period (1963-2003), developing countries increased the amount of calories they consumed from meat (119%), sugar (127%) and vegetable oils (199%), and industrialised countries also increased vegetable oil consumption (105%). Globally, diets became increasingly energy-dense and rich in sugar, salt and saturated fats, as many higher-fibre foods were replaced by heavily processed foods.

According to the report, agricultural policies led to these shifts in diets through two channels. First, maize and soybean have become a conveniently cheap input for the food-processing and livestock industries. Most of the world’s soybean is processed into meal to feed animals and into vegetable oil. Increasingly larger quantities of cereals (primarily maize) are used to produce sweeteners derived from starch (high-fructose corn syrup), largely explaining the global increase in caloric sweetener consumed. In 2000, says the report, 306 kcal were consumed per person per day, about a third more than in 1962, and caloric sweeteners by then also accounted for a larger share of both total energy and total carbohydrates consumed.

‘Because the prices of basic crops went through such a significant decline, the agrifood industry responded by “adding value” by heavily processing foods, leading to diets richer in saturated and trans-fatty acids, salt and sugars. This, combined with urbanisation and higher employment rates for women, precipitated the rapid expansion for processed foods, both domestically and through exports dumped on foreign markets.’

Another impact on diets was through the price channel, by changing the relative prices of foods in the consumer’s basket. In high-income countries, healthy diets including a wide range of fruits and vegetables are more expensive than diets rich in oils, sugars and fats. While this may not be the reason why overweight and obesity have been increasing over the

years, it is certainly one factor among others responsible for this situation, the report underlines.

The report finds that the globalisation of food supply chains affects nutrition in two ways. First, the general pattern has been for developing countries to export high-quality foods, tropical fruits and vegetables in particular, to rich countries, while importing refined grains.

This means that while increased trade may have lowered the price of macro-nutrients in low-income countries (although with a greater vulnerability to price shocks), the reverse has been true for micro-nutrient-rich products, leading poor families in developing countries to shift to monotonous, micro-nutrient-poor diets, relying mainly on starchy staples, as more diverse diets may become unaffordable or less affordable than diets comprised of staples.

Second, the globalisation of food chains leads to a shift from diets high in complex carbohydrates and fibre to diets with a higher proportion of fats and sugars. As a result of this 'nutrition transition', disease patterns shift away from infectious and nutrient-deficiency diseases toward higher rates of coronary heart disease, non-insulin-dependent diabetes, some types of cancer and obesity. This trend is particularly noticeable in emerging economies.

While the globalisation of food chains has meant that a diversity of foods are available year-round to certain consumers, it has had negative impacts on local food systems and increased the ecological footprint of food systems. It has also led many consumers to shift towards an increased consumption of staple grains, meat and dairy products, vegetable oil, salt and sugar, and a lower intake of dietary fibre.

'Increased foreign direct investment in the processing industry and supermarket expansions have made processed foods, including in particular soft drinks, accessible to a larger range of consumers (albeit not to the poorest among them).'

The report notes for instance that following the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement, US companies massively increased investments in the Mexican

food-processing industry (from \$210 million in 1987 to \$5.3 billion in 1999) and sales of processed foods in Mexico soared at an annual rate of 5 to 10% in the period from 1995 to 2003. The resulting rise in soft drink and snack consumption by Mexican children is at the source of the very high rates of child obesity in the country.

'Significant concerns are expressed today about the marketing practices of the agrifood industry, particularly as regards marketing to children. The range of practices is wide: they include television advertising, product placement, promotional partnerships, sales promotions, and direct marketing in schools, among others. Most advertisements promote unhealthy foods, high in total energy, sugars and fats, and low in nutrients.'

According to the report, a recent study covering television advertising in Australia, Asia, Western Europe, and North and South America, found that in all sampled countries, children were exposed to high volumes of television advertising for unhealthy foods, featuring child-oriented persuasive techniques, leading the authors to call for regulation of food advertising during children's peak viewing times.

Recommendations

The report goes on to make several suggestions with respect to protecting and promoting adequate diets. For instance, it recommends using taxation to encourage healthy diets, saying that the introduction of food taxes and subsidies to promote a healthy diet constitutes a cost-effective and low-cost population-wide intervention that can have a significant impact. Research shows that a 10% tax on soft drinks, which have considerable negative health impacts, could lead to an 8 to 10% reduction in purchases of these beverages.

'The standard concern raised when such taxes are discussed is that they could penalise the poorest segment of the population, who spend proportionally more of their incomes on food and often are pushed into adopting unhealthy diets. But that concern can be met by using the public revenue from the tax to make

healthy foods more affordable, for it is relative prices that must change.'

The report also calls for the revision of the existing system of subsidies, saying that where subsidies are an agricultural policy instrument, they are often biased in favour of large grain and soybean producers, or of the livestock industry. The potential negative externalities on public health and the environment were never considered in shaping those subsidies. The existing subsidies must now be re-examined in order to align agricultural policies with the requirement of adequate diets.

Furthermore, the report advocates the regulation of marketing practices. States should implement fully in legislation the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent WHA resolutions.

But the marketing practices of the food industry have impacts such that bolder action is required. Self-regulation by the agrifood industry has proven ineffective, the Special Rapporteur notes, adding that he sees no reason why the promotion of foods that are known to have detrimental health impacts should be allowed to continue unimpeded.

'Premature deaths resulting from non-communicable diseases linked to bad diets are deaths that can be avoided, and States have a duty to protect in this regard. By implementing the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding and the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, as well as the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, States are not only making political commitments but also discharging their duty under international human rights law to guarantee the right to adequate food.'

As such, the report underscores, States should set binding targets in pursuing a double-track approach: (a) protecting the right to adequate diets; and (b) ensuring a transition towards more sustainable diets. ♦

Kanaga Raja is Editor of the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS), which is published by the Third World Network. This article is reproduced from SUNS (No. 7308, 14 February 2012).

A ticking time-bomb

Malnutrition is a silent killer and causes the death of some 300 children every hour, warns a new report by Save the Children, a leading international NGO on children's rights. *Chee Yoke Heong* highlights its stark findings.

ABOUT 300 children die from malnutrition every hour while one in four children is stunted, and in developing countries that figure rises to one in three. If the trend continues, more than 450 million children globally will be affected by stunting in the next 15 years.

These stark statistics are revealed by a new report by the charity Save the Children – *A Life Free from Hunger: Tackling Child Malnutrition* – which laments the extremely slow progress made in reducing malnutrition over the past 20 years as compared to other global health issues. It calls for urgent actions to be stepped up.

'This is a hidden hunger crisis that could destroy the lives of nearly half a billion children unless world leaders act to stop it,' Justin Forsyth, chief executive of Save the Children, told the *Guardian* newspaper.

The organisation wants leaders of the G8 and G20 major economies to take up the issue in their summits in the next two years.

It points out that 2012 is a crucial year to prevent the crisis from worsening as by 2013 it would be too late to prevent stunting in this last generation of children who will reach their second birthday – a crucial nutrition milestone – by 2015, the deadline for achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

Malnutrition is the underlying cause of death of more than 2.6 million children each year, a third of under-five deaths, and a third of total child deaths. Unlike headline-grabbing emergencies, the unseen crisis of long-term chronic malnutrition is more devastating in terms of scale but has failed to attract global attention.

According to the World Health Organisation, poor nutrition is the most important single threat to the



About 300 children die from malnutrition every hour, while one in four children is stunted.

world's health. But because death resulting from malnutrition is not officially recorded in the statistics, efforts at addressing the problem have largely been neglected.

'Malnutrition is a silent killer – under-reported, under-addressed and consequently under-prioritised,' according to the report.

It is estimated that 80% of the world's stunted children are in just 20 countries, with malnutrition as the cause of 51% of diarrhoea deaths, 57% of malaria deaths, 52% of pneumonia deaths and 45% of measles deaths.

Global progress in combating stunting – a consequence of chronic malnutrition – is not fast enough given the seriousness of the crisis, according to the report. Between 1990 and 2010, the percentage of stunted children fell from 39.7% to 26.7% or 82 million children.

Progress is even slower in Africa, which saw a reduction of only 2% in 20 years, while in West Africa stunt-

ing rates have stagnated at 38%. But due to population growth, the numbers of stunted children actually increased by 15 million between 1990 and 2010 and this figure is expected to grow in the future. Nigeria is predicted to have 2.4 million more stunted children by 2020 and in Tanzania another 450,000 children will be stunted.

In Asia, while East and parts of South-East Asia have recorded a commendable reduction in the number of malnourished children, this is not the case in South and much of South-East Asia (i.e., Cambodia and Laos). It is predicted that the prevalence of stunting will fall by just a quarter (or 26%) in South-Central Asia in the next 10 years compared with half in Eastern Asia.

In comparison, the malnutrition rate in Asia in 2020 is predicted to be half of that in Africa and the top eight countries with the fastest declines in stunting will be from Asia, according to Save the Children.

Many children in the developing world suffer from malnutrition because their diets consist mainly of starchy foods like rice, maize or millet with few vegetables and little protein, hence depriving them of a balanced diet.

The lack of proper nutrition means their brains and bodies will not develop properly, leading to severe consequences. A child suffering prolonged malnutrition will grow up physically shorter, usually with lower IQs, and have a high likelihood of doing less well at school and also earning less as an adult, says the report.

Economic growth is also negatively affected by malnutrition, leading to as much as a 2-3% loss in GDP yearly in poor countries, while globally it is estimated that the direct cost of child malnutrition is between \$20

billion and \$30 billion per year.

Besides benefiting a country's GDP, ensuring good nutrition for young children will also in the long term cut costs by preventing illnesses. It has been estimated that 11% of the global disease burden relates back to malnutrition; thus, improving childhood nutrition would eventually reduce national health bills.

The report's analysis suggests that while better nutrition can be positive for economic growth and development, a growing economy does not necessarily translate into an improvement in nutrition.

'Although economic growth no doubt played a role in the reduction of stunting in some countries, a growing GDP in itself is not sufficient to guarantee a positive impact on nutrition,' the report states. For example, between 1990 and 2009, the GDP of Vietnam grew at an average of 6% per year while the number of stunted children fell by about 4% each year, halving the number since 1990. However, in neighbouring Myanmar, GDP grew faster during the same period at 8% a year but stunting fell by only 1.5% each year, or a drop from 46% in 1990 to 41% based on the latest figures available.

Underlying causes

The underlying causes of increased risk of malnutrition and stunting among children are varied. Among them are climate change, high food prices, poverty, socio-economic factors, and conflicts and political upheavals.

Adverse changes in climate such as extreme weather events, including high temperatures, droughts and floods, are already more frequent and severe and are threatening food security. Future cereal yields are expected to be affected and it is predicted that there will be 11-24 million more malnourished children or an increase of 10-12% in 2050 as a result of adverse climate change impacts on agricultural production.

Poverty is another major contributory factor to why children are not receiving proper nutrition. The



A maize field in Zambia being replanted after a prolonged drought. Climate change is threatening agricultural production and food security.

situation is not likely to improve, as World Bank findings suggest that poverty is set to increase as families face falling incomes, rising costs and shrinking public expenditure such as aid.

And soaring food prices have made the situation worse. The report estimates that food price spikes since June 2010 might have pushed another 44 million people into poverty. 'When food prices skyrocket, children feel the effects in their daily diets, and their nutrition suffers,' the report says.

Growing land acquisitions by governments, corporations and others (sometimes called 'land grabs') are also said to have worsened food and nutrition security of poorer countries. Such takeovers of large tracts of land often displace small farmers and convert land away from growing food, thus putting many poor people at risk of malnutrition. The report quotes the United Nations as saying that 'large-scale investment is damaging the food security, incomes, livelihoods and environment for local people'.

Conflicts and political upheavals have been shown to be devastating to progress against malnutrition and stunting, as in the case of Cote d'Ivoire and Burundi. In the latter, where 50% of the population was displaced between 1994 and 2001, it was found that children in areas affected

by conflict were more likely to be stunted than others as crops were destroyed or stolen.

In Cote d'Ivoire, one of the worst countries in terms of progress against stunting, a breakdown in public healthcare during the civil war that began in 2002 resulted in a drastic drop in intervention efforts including immunisation and vitamin A supplementation, as well as breastfeeding.

The Save the Children report does highlight some progress made in saving children's lives – for example, the number of children not making it to their fifth birthday fell by 4.4 million between 1990 and 2011 – but stresses the need to keep up the momentum and to 'accelerate efforts to improve nutrition, which holds the key to further progress'.

The solutions to malnutrition are already well known, proven effective and relatively cheap. According to the World Bank, it could cost as little as \$10.3 to \$11.8 billion a year to successfully tackle malnutrition in 36 countries that are home to 90% of the world's stunted children.

What is needed in most cases is political commitment and leadership in implementing nutrition programmes, said the report. These include direct interventions such as providing food supplements and fortification.

Preventing families from falling into poverty by providing cash and food to vulnerable families and introducing social protection schemes as safety nets have also shown to be successful.

The report also points out that the current global food system is failing to meet the hunger and nutritional needs of many people in the world. The challenge is not just to increase production but to improve nutrition through agriculture.

It calls, among others, for more support for small-scale farmers and women farmers, a greater focus on agricultural projects that will improve children's diets and making nutritious food available and affordable. ♦

Chee Yoke Heong is a researcher with the Third World Network.

600 million jobs needed to spur growth over next decade

Projecting a possible double-dip recession in advanced countries, increasing unemployment and underemployment, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) says the world must rise to the urgent challenge of creating 600 million jobs over the next decade in order to generate sustainable growth.

Kanaga Raja

IN its *Global Employment Trends 2012* report, the ILO says that the world enters the year 2012 facing a stark reality: one in three workers in the labour force is currently either unemployed or poor. Out of a global labour force of 3.3 billion, 200 million are unemployed and a further 900 million are living with their families below the \$2-a-day poverty line.

The ILO projects 400 million new entrants into labour markets over the next 10 years. As a result, on top of the challenge of improving labour productivity in developing countries to lift the world's 900 million working poor out of poverty, 400 million new jobs will be needed simply to avoid a further increase in global unemployment.

'Despite strenuous government efforts, the jobs crisis continues unabated, with one in three workers worldwide – or an estimated 1.1 billion people – either unemployed or living in poverty,' said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. 'What is needed is that job creation in the real economy must become our number one priority.'

Rapid slowdown

According to the ILO report, global growth has decelerated rapidly, increasing the threat of a prolonged jobs recession. Following the deepest global recession since the end of the Second World War, the recovery has been shortlived and shallow, barely recovering to rates prior to the crisis and unable to close the gap that has opened up.



Two unemployed construction workers in Mexico City waiting for jobs. Global unemployment remained elevated in 2011, with some 200 million unemployed around the world.

In the meantime, it adds, the macroeconomic woes in some advanced economies have worsened, increasing global uncertainty.

While only a few countries have been facing serious and long-term economic and fiscal challenges, the global economy has cooled down fast as uncertainty has spread beyond the advanced economies, moving the world economy even further away from the pre-crisis trend path. At the current juncture, even a double-dip recession remains a distinct possibility, it warns.

Partly, the protracted nature of the recovery is due to the nature and depth of the crisis as well as its synchronised impact, which required policy action and economic adjustments on several fronts.

'A combination of unresolved fi-

nancial market problems and financial reforms that have not yet been fully operationalised, a shift of private debt into public debt and subsequent sovereign debt sustainability issues, an ongoing process of private sector de-leveraging and a global and sectoral restructuring of activities triggered by the crisis has put the brakes on global growth.'

Grim (un)employment outlook

As a result of the weaker-than-expected recovery, labour markets are unlikely to recover from the strain they have suffered since the beginning of the crisis, the report cautions.

For the fourth consecutive year, says the ILO, global unemployment remained elevated in 2011, with more

than 197 million unemployed around the world, a figure unchanged from the year before and still nearly 27 million more than in 2007.

The number of unemployed around the world increased by 5.8 million in 2008 and then surged by more than 21 million in 2009, an increase from a rate of 5.5% to 6.2%. Global unemployment remains stuck at a rate of around 6.0%, despite rapid economic growth of 5.1% in 2010 and 4% in 2011.

The baseline projection shows no change in the global unemployment rate between now and 2016, remaining at 6% of the global labour force. This would lead to an additional 3 million unemployed around the world, giving a total of 200 million in 2012, and rising to 206 million by 2016, says the report.

Downside risks to economic activity have increased substantially since mid-2011, with global growth of below 2% in 2012 a growing possibility. The most notable risks are: the question of debt sustainability in weak sovereigns and exposure of banks in a number of advanced economies, which could spark contagion; in countries such as Japan, the United States and many in the euro area, policies that are insufficiently strong to address the effects of the crisis on the major advanced economies; vulnerabilities (including risks of overheating from surging credit growth) in some emerging market economies; and volatile commodity prices and geopolitical tensions.

The report highlights both the downside and upside scenarios for global unemployment and employment.

According to the ILO, the downside scenario assumes negative shocks in the euro area (primarily through bank capital reflecting losses on holdings of public debt), the United States (through slower potential output growth and increasing loan losses on mortgage portfolios) and emerging Asia (through losses on non-performing loans). The scenario assumes fallout effects in other regions, for instance, through a decline in commodity prices, which impacts com-

modity exporters.

In this scenario, global growth would fall to 1.6% in 2012 and then rise to around 5% in 2013, versus the baseline projection of 4% growth in 2012 and 4.5% in 2013.

In the downside scenario, global unemployment would rise to 204 million in 2012, 4 million more than under the baseline scenario, with a further increase to 209 million in 2013, 6 million more than in the baseline scenario.

The largest impact is projected for the Developed Economies and European Union region, which would have an additional 3 million unemployed in 2012 and an additional 4 million unemployed in 2013 versus the baseline scenario. This region's unemployment rate would rise to 9% in 2012 and edge up to 9.1% in 2013, versus projections of 8.5% for 2012 and 8.4% under the baseline scenario.

According to the report, the upside scenario for global unemployment and employment assumes a relatively benign outcome from the euro debt crisis, which would lead to growth acceleration in the Developed Economies and European Union region (from 1.4% in 2011 to 2.5% in 2012), which in turn would lead to somewhat faster growth in regions with strong ties to Europe and the United States, namely, Central and South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) and CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), Latin America and the Caribbean and the Asian regions.

In the upside scenario, global unemployment would be around 1 million lower than in the baseline scenario in 2012 and 1.7 million lower in 2013. However, this would not be sufficient to significantly alter the trajectory of the global unemployment rate, which is projected to remain stuck at around 6%.

The reduction in unemployment would largely occur in the Developed Economies and European Union region, where the unemployment rate would fall from 8.5% in 2011 to 8.3% in 2012 and to 8.2% in 2013.

The report also finds that in 2011, 74.8 million youth aged 15-24 were unemployed, an increase of more than

4 million since 2007. The global youth unemployment rate, at 12.7%, remains a full percentage point above the pre-crisis level. Globally, young people are nearly three times as likely as adults to be unemployed.

In this light, the increase in social unrest in many countries and regions around the world is of little surprise. 'In the Middle East and North Africa regions, for example, youth are around four times as likely as adults to be unemployed, with youth unemployment rates well in excess of 25% in both regions.'

Decline in labour force participation

According to the report, the increase in global unemployment of nearly 27 million since 2007 is unprecedented, and this headline figure provides an indication of the severity of the shock to many labour markets around the world.

Nevertheless, the figure substantially understates the extent of the global employment shortfall. In many countries, there is evidence of an accelerated decline in labour force participation.

In the five years from 2002 to 2007, the global labour force participation rate declined from 65.1% to 64.8%, a drop of 0.3 percentage points. In the four years from 2007 to 2011, the rate dropped to 64.1%, a decline of 0.7 percentage points. The pace of decline in labour force participation at the global level since 2007 has been two-and-a-half times greater than in the five years leading up to the crisis.

In the world as a whole, there were nearly 29 million fewer people in the labour force in 2011 than would have been expected based on pre-crisis trends. This number is equal to nearly 1% of the actual global labour force in 2011, and to nearly 15% of the total number of unemployed in the world.

'Put another way, if all of these potential workers were available to work and sought work, the number of unemployed would swell to over 225 million, or to a rate of 6.9%, versus

the actual rate of 6%.’

The report finds that participation rates have plunged in many countries in the Developed Economies and European Union region, resulting in 6 million fewer people in the labour force than would have been expected based on pre-crisis trends. Adding this cohort to the unemployed would raise the region’s unemployment rate from 8.5% to 9.6%.

Youth in developed economies have been hardest hit: youth comprise one-third of the labour force shortfall versus less than 12% of the region’s labour force, with a total of 2 million fewer youth in the labour force than would have been expected.

Productivity growth

‘Viewing employment and productivity growth rates together sheds light on whether the economic downturn has been characterised more by impacts on employment or by impacts on productivity and whether employment growth or productivity growth [is] likely to lead a recovery,’ the report says.

Globally, employment grew at an average annual rate of 1.1% between 2008 and 2011 and is projected to accelerate to 1.4% growth in 2012-13, compared with historical growth of 1.8%. The longer-run projection over 2014 to 2016 is for continued sluggish growth of 1.3%.

In contrast to this, while labour productivity growth for the world as a whole did decelerate – averaging only 1.6% between 2008 and 2011 – and was on a decelerating trend prior to the crisis, the impact of the crisis on labour markets has been skewed more towards weak employment generation than towards reduced labour productivity growth and this trend is projected to persist over the next several years.

‘As labour productivity growth is projected to rebound to above trend growth rates over the projection period, this provides evidence that,



Nearly 30% of the world’s workers live below the \$2-a-day poverty line.

based on the projected rates of economic growth, there is space to accelerate employment generation globally while still maintaining levels of productivity growth in line with pre-crisis trends.’

In terms of labour productivity levels, says the report, the gap between labour productivity in the developed and developing regions has narrowed over the past two decades, but it remains substantial: output per worker in the Developed Economies and European Union region was \$72,900 in 2011, compared with an average of \$13,600 in developing regions. This means that, adjusted for differences in prices across countries, the average worker in a developing country produces less than one-fifth of the output of the average worker in a developed country.

Working poverty

According to the ILO, there were an estimated 456 million workers around the world living below the \$1.25-a-day poverty line in 2011, a reduction of 233 million since 2000 and of 38 million since 2007.

However, this global aggregate is heavily influenced by the dramatic decline in extreme working poverty in the East Asia region, where, owing to rapid economic growth and pov-

erty reduction in China, the number of poor workers has declined by 158 million since 2000 and by 24 million since 2007.

In terms of rates, while in the world as a whole the share of workers living below the \$1.25 poverty line declined from 26.4% to 14.8% between 2000 and 2011, in the world excluding East Asia, the decline over the same period was far less: a reduction of 7.6 percentage points, from 25% to 17.4%.

Nearly 30% of all workers in the world – more than 910 million – are living with their families below the \$2-a-day poverty line. These workers and their dependents remain highly vulnerable to further

economic shocks.

While the global share has declined from 46% in 2000, progress has again been far faster in East Asia than in the rest of the developing world, the report observes. East Asia has managed to reduce the number of working poor who live below the \$2 poverty line by 247 million since 2000, which is more than six times the level of poverty reduction in the developing world excluding East Asia, where the rate of poverty reduction has been mixed. In sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, South Asia and the Middle East, the number of workers living with their families on less than \$2 a day continues to grow.

While working poverty has been on the decline, there has been a marked slowdown in progress since 2008. A projection of pre-crisis (2002-07) trends in the incidence of working poverty shows a difference of 1.6 percentage points in 2011. This amounts to 50 million more working poor in 2011 than projected based on pre-crisis trends.

Similarly, there are an estimated 55 million more workers in 2011 living with their families below the \$2 poverty line than expected on the basis of pre-crisis trends.

Strongly linked to the working poverty indicator, the report says, is the indicator on ‘vulnerable employ-

ment', defined as the sum of own-account workers and unpaid family workers.

The number of workers in vulnerable employment globally in 2011 was estimated at 1.52 billion, an increase of 136 million since 2000. This corresponds to a trend decline of the global vulnerable employment rate to 49.1%, down from 52.8% in 2000.

'This moderate decline was, however, not sufficient to prevent the absolute number of workers in vulnerable employment from increasing by nearly 23 million since 2009 due to a continuous expansion of the labour force in those countries most heavily affected by vulnerable employment conditions.'

The East Asia region has seen a reduction in vulnerable employment of 40 million since 2007, compared with increases of 22 million in sub-Saharan Africa, 12 million in South Asia, nearly 6 million in South-East Asia and the Pacific, 5 million in Latin America and the Caribbean and more than 1 million in the Middle East.

Regional trends

In terms of regional economic and labour market developments, in the Developed Economies and European Union region, the report finds that job losses during the crisis and the ensuing slow recovery resulted in a widening of unemployment gaps to historically high levels, reaching 45 million unemployed in 2010. Among developed economies, only Germany and Australia managed to increase employment in 2011 to above pre-crisis levels.

The report underscores that the current move towards austerity policies and across-the-board cuts in public spending programmes that are observed in the region are unwarranted and are likely to compound the problems in the labour market.

The outlook for employment



As a result of the economic crisis and ensuing slow recovery, the developed countries saw a widening of unemployment gaps to historically high levels. Picture shows Spanish youth protesting against skyrocketing joblessness in Madrid last May.

creation has substantially worsened over the second half of 2011. With growth rates stalling and the return of recessionary conditions in some of the advanced economies, unemployment is on the rise again, projected to reach 43.6 million or 8.5% of the region's labour force in 2012.

Should growth prospects further deteriorate, already weak labour markets would take additional strain and unemployment rates could rise beyond 9% by 2013, the highest rate on record. Even under more favourable macroeconomic conditions, however, and with a quicker return of recovery, it is unlikely that the region would revert to pre-crisis unemployment rates before the end of the projection period in 2016.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region returned to pre-crisis economic growth rates in 2010 and continued its strong performance in 2011, albeit at a slower pace. Economic growth for the region is estimated at 4.5% in 2011, compared with 6.1% in 2010 and an average annual rate of 3.6% for the period 2000 to 2007. Continued growth is expected for 2012, albeit at a lower rate of 4.0%. The unemployment rate is projected to remain steady at 7.2%.

Following a remarkable rebound in 2010 (9.8%), economic activity in East Asia in 2011 decelerated but remained robust (8.5%), led by Mongolia (11.5%), China (9.5%), Hong Kong-China (6.0%) and Taiwan-China (5.2%).

Strong economic growth has continued to fuel employment growth. In 2011, employment in East Asia increased by an estimated 6.5 million, or 0.8%, consisting of 4.1 million additional men and 2.4 million additional women in employment, says the report.

Employment growth in East Asia is forecast to decrease from a rate of 0.8% in 2011 to 0.6% in 2012, with little change projected

in the employment-to-population ratio (from 70.2% in 2011 to 70.1% in 2012), while the unemployment rate in East Asia is projected to remain unchanged at 4.1% (4.7% for men and 3.4% for women) in 2012. However, youth unemployment is expected to remain elevated, reaching 8.9% in 2012 (10.5% for young men and 7.1% for young women).

Economic growth in the sub-Saharan Africa region slowed down to 2.8% at the height of the economic crisis in 2009, but rebounded strongly to 5.4% in 2010. The region continued its recovery in 2011, growing at 5.2%.

Economic growth in 2012 in sub-Saharan Africa is projected at 5.8%, which is close to the pre-crisis average during 2000 to 2007, but – as in other regions – this benign outlook depends to a large extent on the dynamics of the global economy and, in particular, on growth in middle-income countries and oil exporters.

Current projections of the unemployment rate show little change between 2011 and 2012 (8.2% in both years), says the report. ♦

This article is reproduced from the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS, No. 7294, 25 January 2012).

Flowers on a dung heap

Markets, politicians and the demise of Russian rural life

Western analysts commenting on the recent political upsurge in Russia have attributed it solely to the growing disaffection of Russia's new middle classes with Vladimir Putin's fraudulent and authoritarian political order. But such analyses ignore the more widespread economic discontent among the lower-income groups that has accompanied the post-Soviet transformation. *Roman Yushkov and Vassily Moseyev* examine the devastation and deterioration of Russian rural life in their native Perm region brought about by economic reforms from the 1990s onwards.

WE both spend a lot of time in rural parts of our native Perm region, as well as in other parts of the country. We spend time outside the city for work and we travel around the region because we have friends and family who live in the countryside. But every year these trips into the countryside become more and more difficult to bear.

The deterioration of rural Russia is a painful sight. Fields have turned into wastelands of giant hogweed and sapling trees. Decaying cottages sag into the ground. Most of them are empty, but there are still some that show signs of habitation.

Rusted bars and ruined concrete slabs are all that remain of the abandoned farm buildings, and the locals go around looking tired and apathetic, with any gleam of hope having left their eyes long ago. It is difficult to have a conversation with them because they ask you, as a sophisticated city-dweller, hard questions, to which the answer is either impossible to know or so difficult to deliver that it catches in your throat.

People on the edge of worthlessness

The rural communities and industries of the Perm region are fairly typical of those in most other Russian provinces. While the steppe here was never the breadbasket of Russia, in Soviet times rye and vegetables were successfully grown in the region



An abandoned farm in Nozhkino, Russia. The Russian agricultural sector is coming apart as a result of aggressive free-market reforms.

around the Kama River and there was a thriving beef and dairy industry. The land was rich enough to support a developing society. Nowadays, however, the dilapidated agricultural sector in this area is repeated in regions right across the country.

Almost half a million people have left the rural parts of the Perm region since the end of the Soviet Union 20 years ago. Most of them are young people. This exodus has been catastrophic for an area with a population of only 2.5 million. The region shows tens of thousands of tragic sacrifices to new, Russian capitalism.

The cities were not ready to accommodate the influx of people from the countryside. There is no employment or housing for them. Only loneliness and alienation awaits them in the city, which is a far cry from the tight social networks which they left behind in the villages. Most of them end up in crowded, filthy boarding houses on the edges of town and many of them turn to crime and prostitution

for survival.

Staying in the countryside is not an alternative. The deadly emptiness and sense that nothing is ever going to happen is the worst kind of existence. One thousand and five hundred villages and small towns in the area are officially 'dying out'. Post-Soviet economic reforms have left the infrastructure of the area in a post-war condition. Schools and kindergartens close down with alarming regularity and of the remaining 600 schools in the area, 468 are literally crumbling to pieces. In the past 15 years, around 200 hospitals and clinics and 300 midwifery and paramedic units have been closed down in Perm's rural areas. Rural paramedics have dwindled by 30% in the region.

The majority of remaining inhabitants of the countryside are old women. Only a handful of nuclear families remain. A few old collective farms remain from the Soviet era but they too are on their last legs, powered by nothing but a few old, dilapi-



Peasant women in rural Russia. Russia's farmers now produce less than 3% of the country's grain yield and less than 2% of its meat and dairy produce.

dated combine harvesters. Workers on the collective farms earn less than 2,000 roubles a month (under €50), a pittance far beneath any minimum wage threshold, but even these jobs are in demand. In the Perm region, the number of people laid off from jobs in the agricultural sector is 10,000 times the number of people still employed in the industry.

People buy food on credit because nobody has any hard cash. Of course many resort to alcohol as a way of coping with these circumstances. Alcohol is easy to get hold of if you are prepared to drink the cheapest kind of methylated spirit that is made available by criminal gangs who distribute alcohol throughout the whole area. The chemicals in this poison destroy the men who resort to drinking it; you can see the alcohol wreaking havoc on them as soon as they fall into the trap of addiction.

This particular phenomenon inspires some social analysts to suggest that the Russian, Udmurt and Komi-Permyak people of rural Perm are doomed, and there's nothing that can be done about it. This theory is particularly pertinent when these populations are compared with the Chinese and Tadjik peoples of the region, who seem to be thriving. Their relative success is attributed to their ability to move from one town to another to look for work. They are more adaptable and have a culture of looking after one another within their communities, which helps them survive in difficult conditions.

Analysts believe that the people

who are native to the area are too static and paternalistic; they are too passive and don't have a competitive nature. We would suggest that if our people are less robust and more dependent on the state, then shouldn't we give them work, provide hospitals and subject them to prohibition laws? 'But why?' the economic experts retort. 'These people are hopeless cases.' Our free-market experts are not ashamed of subscribing to social Darwinism.

Tales of an uprooted spud

For each rouble that is spent in the Perm region on food, only 9 kopeks go towards products that are produced in Russia. This statistic is extraordinary when you consider that almost one-quarter of the population of the region (680,000 people) still live on agricultural land. In 1991, just before the economic reforms were brought in, the total area of farmland in the region amounted to almost two million hectares. Now only 800,000 hectares remain. Six hundred and fifty thousand hectares of this abandoned farmland is no longer tillable because it has been overgrown by forests. The area of arable land and the head-count of cattle are steadily decreasing. The agricultural yield of the region is at its lowest in 20 years.

The fate of Russia's 'second bread', the humble potato, is indicative of the trend throughout the agricultural sector. The potato has been declared a priority by the region's authorities because it is so easy to

grow in Russia's earth and climate. However, the area of land devoted to this crop has been cut by almost 4%, to 4,000 hectares. The pitiful yield amounts to 95 hundredweight for every hectare (just under 5 tonnes). This yield of spuds could barely feed the inhabitants of the region.

Common land for the cultivation of vegetables has been cut by 5% and greenhouse cultivation, an industry that had never been fully developed here, has effectively disappeared. The same could be said for dairy farming. The cattle count in the area has diminished by one-third and meat-producing animals have been reduced by the same amount. Production of cattle and poultry feed has also been destroyed because of the reduction of grain harvests by over a third.

It would be unfair to say that the region's authorities have ignored the agricultural sector. In the past several years there have been many initiatives to develop the industry. Projects have been introduced that approve the procurement of new farm machinery, job creation and the provision of accommodation that would attract agricultural experts to the region, but not one of these projects has been followed through. Five and a half billion roubles have been bankrolled for one such project that was drawn up over three years between 2007 and 2010, but official records show that 42% of this sum never left the city. Not one official has been punished for this evaporation of funds.

When the rural people hear about this fraud, they begin to get sentimental for the Stalin era, and who can blame them? Not one of the regeneration reforms has managed to put a halt to the shrinking of croplands and cattle herds, or the decline of healthcare and education in rural areas.

Anyone who grew up in a Communist country will understand the sentiment, 'He who doesn't work, shouldn't eat'. This aphorism holds true whether or not you have been given work to do. In Russia, the consumption of milk has gone down by 40% since 1990, vegetables by 26%, fruit by 32% and fish by 44%. At the

same time, 40% of the food consumed by Russians today is imported. The quality of this food is a subject for a different discussion but suffice to note that our quibble with food standards goes far beyond the European concerns about genetically modified corn and soya. In Perm it is an open secret that our meat production plants make salamis from criminally-imported by-products of kangaroo meat that has been deep frozen for years.

The Soviet authorities received a good deal of criticism for not providing sufficient food production in the country, but 20 years later, there is three times as little food production as there was before the reforms. The country now subsists on the sale of oil, gas and mineral fertilisers, and it is clear from what we see on the shelves of our grocery stores that Russia is helping the agricultural sectors of Argentina, Brazil, Denmark, China and the US. It is obvious that we have lost all consumer security in Russia and that our dependence on foreign food products is higher than recommended norms elsewhere. Food deliveries could be embargoed at any moment and food prices could skyrocket to the point where oil money will lose its purchasing power. After all, analysts tell us that global food supplies are decreasing.

We were told to collect birch twigs

Let's pause here to remember how we got ourselves into this situation in the first place.

During the Perestroika years, there was a lot of heated discussion about the 'peasant question'. The reformists insisted that the peasantry had become cut off from the land, that they had no access to authority and that they were no longer able to reap the rewards of their labour. The collective farms were called 'Agro-gulags' and the slogan 'Give the farmer back his land and he will feed the nation!' was bandied about with aplomb.

By the time public opinion had been sufficiently primed, the president, Boris Yeltsin, announced that the

collective farms were institutions of the past and his words were quickly realised by a few regulatory adjustments. This is how easily the nation's entire agricultural sector came apart. The state rationed out allotments of land to peasants, who had grown up and worked in Soviet conditions and had no idea what to do with private land. They inevitably sold off their plots for peanuts.

Did the farmer feed the nation in the end? At first many people rushed to join the new agricultural sector. Even city folk left for the countryside. They took out loans and bought seeds and cattle, but their euphoria quickly turned to despair as fuel prices increased and they began to feel pressure from tax collectors and racketeers. The number of farmers diminished dramatically. They now produce less than 3% of the country's grain yield and less than 2% of its meat and dairy produce. We are seldom reminded of these embarrassing figures by the authorities.

In the 1990s many economic experts were already warning that the aggressive introduction of agricultural reforms would lead to the inevitable collapse of the industry. They pointed out that private farming was not necessarily the way forward; that in the US, 80% of the country's produce comes from large, industrialised farms. Unfortunately the radical free-market ideology promoted by the West proved more tantalising to Russia's reformers than common sense. The remaining collective farms that struggle for existence in the Perm region do, in fact, produce a high yield in comparison to the private farming sector.

In the early 1990s a group of market economists were invited to Perm to advise on the development of a new agricultural project in the climate of Russia's economic reforms. We clearly remember how their conclusions shocked the local journalists at the time. They suggested that the sphere of meat, grain and potato production should be radically decreased and that technical agriculture, such as the harvesting of flax, should be shut down completely. It seemed to us that

these proposals made no sense in terms of the financial stability of our region.

'What will the million-strong rural population of the region do?' the journalists demanded. 'Well, they can preserve berries and pickle mushrooms and collect birch twigs for the banya,' was the response. 'They could even work on some kind of traditional crafts,' added the team's head, the well-known free-market reformer, Yevgeny Serov.

Perm's press corps just laughed at these suggestions at the time, unable to believe that they should be taken seriously. Who in their right mind would give up their fields and their cows? Twenty years later, nobody is laughing. Those who wanted to put an end to 'ineffective' collective farming as quickly as possible, succeeded admirably.

The mass de-collectivisation of agriculture that took place in the 1990s was steamrolled across the country with a sensitivity that can only be described as Bolshevik. The reformers did not hesitate or tarry in their mission and they certainly didn't refer to public opinion or established industrial practices. Even their primitive slogan, 'The market will regulate itself and solve all our problems!', smacked of the worst kind of Bolshevism. This was exactly how collectivisation was foisted on the people in the 1930s, but the results of those reforms were far less disastrous.

In today's climate of spin and PR, our leaders are under pressure to demonstrate success. Our governors and ministers now appear on television with ostriches and roses. An exotic little ostrich farm and some rose plantations are all that they have to show for new agriculture in the region. The leaders of Russian reform conceal their shame with feathers and flower petals. ♦

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Neither objective nor conclusive

There has been renewed tension over Iran's nuclear programme since the release last November of a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The report is seen as providing justification for the West to tighten its regime of sanctions against Iran to include oil imports and for Israel to continue its sabre-rattling. But what exactly did the report say and how credible is it? *Praful Bidwai* scrutinises its findings.

A NUMBER of countries, led by the United States and the European Union, have tightened sanctions against Iran following a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Iran's nuclear programme, published on 8 November. The report has been hailed in much of the Western media as a 'game-changer' which collects 'a trove of new evidence' and 'meticulously' analyses it. Media reports and analyses endorse the IAEA's conclusion that 'Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear device', and that the project may still be continuing.

This, say Western commentators, raises the spectre of a nuclear-armed Iran under the control of radical Islamists, which will potentially further inflame the already volatile West Asia-North Africa region and can become a threat to global security. Iran, they hold, is only months away from becoming a nuclear weapons state. A debate has ensued on how best this possibility can be countered: through greater diplomatic pressure, tougher sanctions, sabotage of Iran's nuclear activities (including assassinations of its scientists), or direct military action.

Supporters of Iran's nuclear programme, for their part, argue that the evidence in the report, even if it is true, is 'all based on some computerised simulations, not "practical activity"'. That is why the Agency has called the whole project 'studies'. Iran is merely carrying out peaceful nuclear activities relevant to its civilian power programme. It has never hidden anything from the IAEA. The Agency is being vindictive under the influence of its Director-General Yukiya Amano, who is acting at the behest of the US.



The headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. The IAEA's latest report on Iran does not establish that the country has made the decision to cross the nuclear weapons threshold.

No credible evidence

However, a careful analysis of the report shows that while there is strong evidence that Iran carried out clandestine activities in the past to develop a nuclear weapons capability, which go far beyond uranium enrichment, there is no credible evidence that it is continuing with them, and that it is in substantive breach of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or its agreements with the IAEA. Nor has Iran come anywhere near amassing enough weapons-grade highly enriched uranium needed for a single atomic bomb.

The past 'evidence' came to light in 2004 after a laptop computer was spirited out of Iran to US intelligence agencies. Its provenance has been

widely attributed to an Iranian dissident group called Mujahideen-e-Khalq – branded a terrorist organisation by the US State Department – and Israel's Mossad secret agency, and its authenticity has been questioned. At any rate, the material it contained pertained to the period 1998-2003. A US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) concluded in November 2007 that Iran stopped these activities in 2003. The allegation that Iran has since resumed them has not been established through independent and objective corroboration. It remains just an allegation.

More important, there is no evidence whatever that Iran ever crossed the legal 'red line' specified in the 'Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements' it signed with the IAEA –

namely, diverting materials from a civilian to a military nuclear programme. Iran has placed the most important component of its nuclear programme, namely uranium enrichment at two facilities, besides a reactor it is building with Russian assistance at Bushehr, under IAEA inspections. It has substantially complied with the Agency's demands for detailed information.

Yet, there is little doubt that Iran tried in the past to develop capabilities, or at least explore the possibility of acquiring the ability, to turn enriched uranium into weapons. That it is continuing with such efforts is not credibly established by the IAEA report. However, it is well known that Iran already has the means to deliver bombs – such as ballistic missiles with a range of 2,200 kilometres, which can reach US bases in the Middle East as well as Israel. Iran may also be experimenting in a rudimentary manner with ways of adapting the missiles specifically to carry nuclear warheads of certain dimensions, although it is probably far from having accomplished this.

Even hawkishly anti-Iranian analysts, such as those with the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), believe that 'it is true and important that there are no indications that Iran has made a decision to actually construct a nuclear weapon'.

The latest IAEA report, like the previous one of last September and others, does not establish that Iran has made the decision to cross the nuclear weapons threshold, or that it is considering walking out of the NPT, like North Korea did. Even less does it suggest that diplomatic options have been, or are about to be, exhausted to dissuade Iran from an explicitly military nuclear programme.

The 25-page report consists of an 11-page main body, and a 14-page Annex on 'Possible Military Dimensions to Iran's Nuclear Programme'. Most of the 'evidence' that has been cited in media reports highlighting the imminent danger of Iran crossing the threshold – or what Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak calls the 'zone



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visiting the Natanz uranium enrichment plant in 2008. Iran has placed the uranium enrichment process in Natanz – the most important component of its nuclear programme – under IAEA inspections.

of immunity' beyond which its capacity to acquire nuclear weapons would become irreversible and immune even to military attacks – comes from the Annex. And, as we see below, it is based on questionable, uncorroborated sources. The IAEA goes to great lengths to paint a lurid picture of Iran's nuclear activities in the Annex.

The main report confirms that the Iranian government has been basically compliant with its obligations under the NPT and its agreements with the IAEA. Iran has 'declared to the Agency 15 nuclear facilities and nine locations outside facilities where nuclear material is customarily used'. The IAEA has found no evidence that Iran has hidden any facilities from it. The report repeatedly states in respect of different facilities that 'all nuclear material' there remains 'under the Agency's containment and surveillance' and the Agency 'has concluded that the facility has operated as declared by Iran in the Design Information Questionnaire' sent to it.

As regards the two most important installations that can potentially produce fuel for nuclear bombs, the Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP) and the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PEP), both at Natanz, south of Tehran, the report lists their capacity and operational history – although this information is confidential, not public.

The Annex is based primarily on some 1,000 pages of information shared with the Agency by US intelligence in 2005, contained in the laptop computer mentioned above, on which the Agency relies despite its extremely dubious nature. This is supplemented with data from more than 10 member states, and what the IAEA says are its own investigations in Iran, Libya, Pakistan, and Russia. As is bound to be the case with classified intelligence, this is not fully documented or supported by references, names, dates, etc.

The report's Annex says: 'The information which serves as the basis for the Agency's analysis and concerns... is assessed by the Agency to be, overall, credible.' But we only have the Agency's word for this. The IAEA concludes that Iran in the past made 'efforts, some successful, to procure nuclear-related and dual-use equipment and materials by military related individuals and entities'; 'to develop undeclared pathways for the production of nuclear material', acquired 'nuclear weapons development information and documentation from a clandestine nuclear supply network'; and worked 'on the development of an indigenous design of a nuclear weapon including the testing of components'.

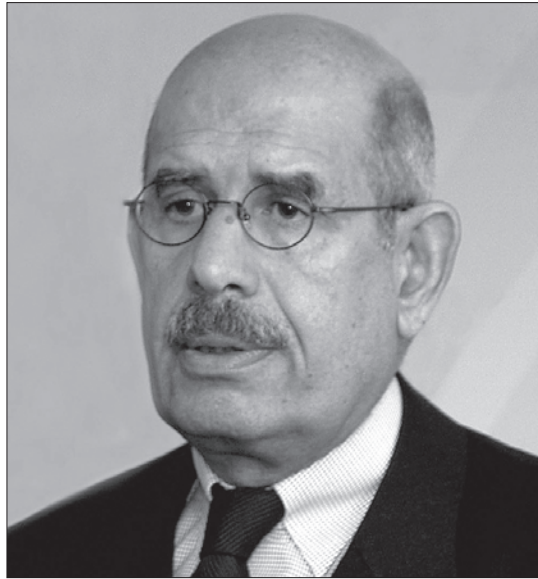
These efforts were halted in 2003,

but the IAEA says that some of them may have been resumed. 'While some of the activities identified in the Annex have civilian as well as military applications, others are specific to nuclear weapons... The information indicates that prior to the end of 2003 the above activities took place under a structured programme [called AMAD].... There are also indications that some activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device continued after 2003, and that some may still be ongoing.'

However, there is no independent corroboration of this. There are serious doubts about the authenticity and credibility of the 'evidence' cited in the Annex. For instance, the Annex makes much of Iran's experiments with 'exploding bridge-wire detonators' (EBWs) and says it recognises that 'there exist non-nuclear applications, albeit few', for these, thus pointing to a likely nuclear weapons connection. But Robert Kelley, a US nuclear engineer and former IAEA inspector, says: 'The Agency is wrong. There are lots of applications for EBWs.' Analysts say the IAEA has failed to prove that the documents are not forgeries by hostile agencies, similar to the Italian forgeries of 2002 pertaining to Iraq's supposed nuclear links to Niger, which were used by the Bush administration to build up a case for invading Iraq.

The IAEA has not established the veracity of the data cited in the Annex. Independent experts have questioned its conclusions. For instance, Kelley terms the IAEA's analysis 'amateurish' and says: 'It's very thin, I thought there would be a lot more there.... It's certainly old news; it's really quite stunning how little new information is in there.' Kelley was among the first to review the original laptop data in 2005.

Seymour Hersh, the independent investigative journalist, wrote an article in *The New Yorker* in June last quoting Mohamed ElBaradei, who served as IAEA Director-General for



Former IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei: 'I don't believe Iran is a clear and present danger. All I see is the hype about the threat posed by Iran.'

12 years, as saying: 'During my time at the agency... we haven't seen a shred of evidence that Iran has been weaponising, in terms of building nuclear-weapons facilities and using enriched materials.' There is evidence that Iranian scientists have studied the issues involved in building and delivering a bomb, he added, 'but the American NIE reported that it stopped even those studies in 2003'. ElBaradei said: 'I am not God – nobody is – and I don't know the future intentions of Iran, but I don't believe Iran is a clear and present danger. All I see is the hype about the threat posed by Iran.'

The NIE itself reached the following conclusion in 2007, which it would not have made public unless it was fully convinced of its assessment about the halt that Iran called to its nuclear weapons development activities: 'We judge with high confidence that the halt lasted at least several years.... We assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons programme as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons. ... We continue to assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Iran does not currently have a nuclear weapon... Tehran's decision to halt its nuclear weapons

programme suggests it is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging since 2005...'

The NIE adds: 'Iran made significant progress in 2007 installing centrifuges at Natanz, but we judge with moderate confidence it still faces significant technical problems operating them... We judge with moderate confidence Iran probably would be technically capable of producing enough HEU [highly enriched uranium] for a weapon sometime during the 2010-2015 time frame... All agencies recognise the possibility that this capability may not be attained until after 2015.'

The IAEA report's Annex does not establish that Iran has resumed most, or the most critical, of the nuclear activities relevant to weapons development or that it is any closer to producing large enough quantities of weapons-grade uranium for a bomb. It is essentially based on uncorroborated information obtained from US intelligence agencies way back in 2005.

Problems with centrifuges

As for the far more cautious, careful and balanced main report of the IAEA, it says that Iran is working with three kinds of gas centrifuges. Iran has some 8,000 centrifuges, but has not even been able to feed more than 6,200 of them – presumably because of operational problems. Centrifuges are extremely fast-spinning machines, much like kitchen liquidisers, which rotate at ultra-high speeds such as 800 revolutions per second, and are meant to separate the fissile isotope of uranium (U-235) from the bulk of natural uranium which consists of U-238, to yield enriched uranium.

All these are in a gaseous form – uranium hexafluoride. Non-enriched or very slightly enriched gas is put through centrifuge cascades repeatedly to obtain progressively higher enrichment. This process is iterated over many cycles to yield the desired enrichment level. All this is more

complex and delicate than may appear. The centrifuges operate at ultra-high speeds. Therefore, the tiniest material imbalance or wear and tear can lead to their breakdown. So can mild seismic tremors.

Most of Iran's centrifuges are configured to produce 3.5% enriched uranium, which is only fit for use in civilian power generation. (To be weapons-grade, uranium must be enriched to 90% of U-235.) Some of Iran's centrifuges also produce smaller quantities of uranium enriched to 19.75%, to feed the small Tehran Research Reactor (TRR). This is done by iterating the enrichment process by feeding centrifuge cascades with 3.5% enriched uranium. This 19.75% enriched material is also considered Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) by the IAEA, as distinct from the HEU needed for a bomb.

Iran has primarily deployed centrifuges of the IR-1 type, believed to be based on a rather crude first-generation P-1 design developed by the AQ Khan Laboratories in Pakistan. It has also deployed a small number of somewhat more advanced IR-2m and IR-4 machines. However, it is known that the performance of the IR-1 centrifuges is not stable and reliable and has declined in recent months even according to ISIS estimates. Says an ISIS report: 'The P-1 centrifuge was derived from a Dutch design that also suffered excessive machine breakage. The new performance data suggests that Iran has not succeeded in overcoming these design problems.'

Further, 'Ten years after the start of construction at the Natanz enrichment site, the probability that Iran will build tens of thousands of IR-1 centrifuges seems remote based on their faulty performance... [B]ecause of sanctions, Iran is also facing a shortage of a key material, [a special type of steel known as maraging steel]... needed to make IR-1 bellows... The number of IR-1 centrifuges installed at the FEP climbed steadily to a peak of almost 9,000 in November 2009 before falling in late 2009 or early 2010 [to less than 4,000] ostensibly due to the effects of the Stuxnet malware...' (This software is sus-



The control room at Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant. There is no evidence that Iran ever diverted materials from a civilian to a military nuclear programme.

pected to have been introduced by Israel.) 'By late 2010 or early 2011, about 6,000 IR-1 centrifuges were enriching, and this remains the current value.'

The IR-2m and IR-4 centrifuges are based on AQ Khan's P-2 design, which is less prone to breakdowns. But the original design is based on maraging steel, which is nearly impossible to procure. So Iran has tried to substitute the steel with high-strength carbon fibre. But, says an ISIS report, 'building a reliable carbon fibre bellows may pose technical challenges that increase the risk of centrifuge failure.'

Further, says the ISIS, 'Iran has failed on numerous occasions to buy high quality carbon fibre abroad. Such purchases by Iran violate sanctions, and states have exerted considerable effort in detecting and thwarting Iranian efforts to obtain carbon fibre in recent years... [I]n late August 2011, Iran announced that it had begun to domestically produce its own carbon fibre. However, this carbon fibre is judged to be of relatively poor quality and not adequate for gas centrifuge rotors.'

Improbable assumptions

Iran has since 2007 enriched about 5,000 kg of uranium to 3.5%. It has also enriched a little less than 80 kg to 19.75% since production began in February 2010. This is

enough to feed the TRR for some years. It is theoretically estimated that 1,290 kg of 3.5% LEU is needed for one Hiroshima-type bomb. So the first stockpile can produce fuel for almost four bombs – if it can be converted into HEU, and assuming that there is no wastage whatever.

There lies the rub. Usually, a lot more than (about double) the theoretically estimated 1,290 kg is needed for the first bomb because some wastage is inevitable. More important, Iran is highly unlikely to be able to put the LEU through the long iterations necessary to convert it to weapons-grade HEU without being caught in the act during one of the IAEA's surprise inspections. These have recently taken place roughly once every month.

There are two ways of converting LEU to HEU: either reconfigure the piping of the centrifuges extensively and use a multi-stage iterative process; or use 'batch recycling' where the LEU would be re-run through the existing cascade without any re-piping in a one-stage process. But the first possibility is fraught with extreme risk: the re-piping would almost certainly be detected. And the second method is untested. All existing nuclear states are believed to have used a multi-stage process, including Pakistan.

So those who warn that Iran is only some months away from producing enough fissile material for a bomb base themselves on a series of worst-

case assumptions which seem improbable. Besides holding that Iran would somehow master the complex 'batch recycling' method, or successfully cheat IAEA inspectors, they underestimate the practical difficulty in ensuring that Iran would have produced enough HEU before it is caught.

They also believe that once Iran produces enough HEU, it can quickly convert it into a bomb. This too is not easy. Converting the hexafluoride gas into uranium metal, shaping the metal, and assembling it into an explosive device with a detonation mechanism could take at least six months. Nor is Iran likely to take the risk of producing just one bomb. A single weapon might turn out a dud, or not deliver the designed explosive yield. It would have to be tested. And at least one more bomb would be needed for a second-strike capability.

Besides, it seems unlikely that Iran would gamble and take all the risks that walking out of the NPT would entail, including inviting military strikes on its nuclear facilities and more – all for the sake of just one bomb. Making more than one weapon would demand more time, probably two years.

Not irrational

Iran may have Islamist zealots in its leadership, some of whom oppose any reconciliation with Israel. But it is not an irrational irredentist state which plays wild cards to the point of taking existential risks. It has recently played a highly responsible role in Iraq and Afghanistan when it could have easily stirred up trouble for the US through its influence with the Shias in the first case and the Northern Alliance in the second. Iran is not averse or unamenable to diplomacy.

However, Iran cannot be blamed for feeling it is being repeatedly and unfairly cornered. Even when it was willing to accept serious constraints on its nuclear programme, including a swap or trade-off between confining itself to uranium enrichment to 3.5% in return for having 20% enrichment done abroad for domestic use under IAEA supervision, the US put

a spoke in the wheel of the deal being brokered by Turkey and Brazil in 2010.

Raising false alarms about Iran's nuclear pursuits is not new. There have been claims since the 1990s that Iran was a few years away from a bomb. For instance, in 1992, the then Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said that Iran would have nuclear warheads by 1999. Similar predictions have been made more recently. They have never been substantiated.

Yet, Iran's nuclear activities raise many questions which have not been fully answered. Why is it producing more 20% enriched uranium than needed to feed the TRR? What was the motive behind the pre-2003 flirtation with dual-use technologies? Why is Iran building a new underground enrichment plant at Fordow near the holy city of Qom? Why did it suspend complying with the Additional Protocol, involving more intrusive IAEA inspections, after two-and-a-half years?

Some tentative answers have been offered: e.g. that Iran is building up 20% enriched uranium stockpiles because it may have plans for more research reactors in case the TRR is bombed or fuel supply is militarily interrupted. Fereydoun Abbasi, the head of Iran's nuclear programme, has also been quoted as saying that Iran intends to build four or five more research reactors.

Iran is aware of how Iraq's Osirak reactor was bombed by Israel in 1981 while still under construction, and has decided to protect its latest facility in a fortified, deeply buried bunker near Qom. As for the Additional Protocol, it is a voluntary commitment. Signatories Argentina and Brazil also do not permit full IAEA inspections under it.

How one views these arguments depends on one's assessment as to whether Iran is preparing for a 'breakout scenario' because it has decided to acquire nuclear weapons. But there is no firm evidence of this. Last year, US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper confirmed in a Senate hearing that he has a 'high

level of confidence' that Iran 'has not made a decision as of this point to restart its nuclear weapons programme'. Since then, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta has said: 'Are they [Iranians] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No. But we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that's what concerns us.'

As many Israeli analysts, including former Mossad chief Meir Dagan, argue, a military strike will not cripple Iran's nuclear programme; it will at best retard it and provoke a conflagration in the region, with unpredictable consequences for Israeli civilians' safety. Joseph Cirincione of the Ploughshares Fund says US military strikes against hundreds of Iranian targets will at best buy one to three years of time. 'A less powerful Israeli attack could only damage, not destroy, Iran's facilities. Worse, after such a bombing, the Iranian population... would probably rally around the regime, ending any internal debates on whether to build a bomb. Iran would put its nuclear programme on fast-forward...'

Even sanctions have limited value. Since the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran in 2006, the number of centrifuges has increased eight times. Instead of one in 2006, Iran now has two enrichment facilities. Besides, the fact the US sanctions are not readily reversible increases Iran's scepticism about Washington's intentions. Offering Iran real incentives for cooperation with the West remains the greatest diplomatic challenge today. ♦

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Confronting Iran: Warmongering in the Middle East

The dangerous talk of war with Iran accompanied by deployments should awaken public opinion to the unacceptability of leaving regional and global security subject to geopolitical management. It is time for a bottom-up, people-oriented approach that emphasises the imperatives of human security, says *Richard Falk*.

THE public discussion in the West addressing Iran's nuclear programme has mainly relied on threat diplomacy, articulated most clearly by Israeli officials, but enjoying the strong direct and indirect backing of Washington and leading Gulf states. Israel has also been engaging in low-intensity warfare against Iran for several years, apparently supported by the United States, that has been inflicting violent deaths on civilians and disrupting political order in Iran.

Many members of the UN Security Council, along with the membership of the European Union, support escalating sanctions against Iran, and have not demurred when Tel Aviv and Washington talk menacingly about leaving all options on the table, which is 'diplospeak' for their readiness to launch a military attack. At last, however, some signs of sanity are beginning to emerge to slow the march over the cliff. For instance, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, commented harshly on this militarist approach: 'I have no doubt that it would pour fuel on a fire which is already smouldering, the hidden smouldering fire of Sunni-Shia confrontation, and beyond that [it would cause] a chain reaction. I don't know where it would stop.' And recently even the normally hawkish Israeli Minister of Defence, Ehud Barak, evidently fearful of encouraging international panic and perhaps worrying about a preemptive response by Tehran, declared that any decision to launch a military attack by Israel is 'very far off', words that can be read in a variety of ways, mostly not reassuring.

It is not only an American insistence, despite purporting from time to time to prefer a diplomatic solution,



The Dimona nuclear facility in Israel. The unacknowledged nuclear weaponry possessed by Israel is 'the most troublesome threat to regional stability and peace.'

that only threats and force are relevant to resolve this long-incubating political dispute with Iran, but more tellingly, it is the underlying stubborn refusal by Washington for more than three decades to normalise relations with Iran along with its failure to disclaim support for beating the Israeli war drums. If the United States is to be credible about its preference for a diplomatic solution, it must move at long last to accept the verdict of history in Iran that the revolution was a setback for Western strategic ambitions in the country and the region but not an occasion for permanent estrangement.

So far, the United States has shown no willingness despite the passage of more than 30 years to accept the outcome of Iran's popular revolution of 1978-79 that non-violently overthrew the oppressive regime of the Shah, and this must change if there is to be any hope for peaceful con-

flict resolution. We need also to remember, as certainly the Iranians do, that the Shah was returned to power in 1953 thanks to the CIA in a coup against the constitutional and democratically elected government of Mohammed Mossadeq, whose main 'crime' in Washington's eyes was to nationalise the Iranian oil industry. This intervention produced intense resentment among many Iranians that reached its climax with the seizure of the American embassy in November of 1979, with its staff including the ambassador held hostage for more than one year, and was renewed by Pentagon encouragement given to Saddam Hussein's aggression against Iran in 1980 that cost both sides in the war an estimated half million lives.

This prolonged American unwillingness to have normal diplomatic contact with Iran has proved to be a perfect recipe for enmity and misun-

derstanding, especially taking into account the background of American intervention and consistent support given to Iran's regional enemies. Although not often acknowledged, there is also the thinly disguised American interest in recovering access to Iran's high-quality oil fields for Western oil companies. This reliance by the United States over the decades on a negative hard-power diplomacy in dealing with Iran encapsulates the unlearned lessons of past failures of American foreign policy, dating from at least the Vietnam War. We need to look no further than Iran to gain an understanding of America's decline as world leader.

This conflict-oriented mentality that has 'occupied' the White House and Pentagon is so strong in relation to Iran that when others try their best to smooth diplomatic waters, as Brazil and Turkey did in May 2010, the United States angrily responds that such countries should stop their meddling. This is an arrogant reprimand, especially when given the fact that Turkey is Iran's next-door neighbour and has the most to lose if a war results from any further bungling of the unresolved dispute involving Iran's contested nuclear programme. It should be recalled that in 2010 Iran formally agreed with leaders from Brazil and Turkey to store half or more of its then stockpile of low enriched uranium in Turkey, materials that would be needed for further enrichment if Iran was ever to become truly determined to possess a nuclear bomb at the earliest possible time. Instead of welcoming this constructive step back from the precipice, Washington castigated the agreement as diversionary, contending that it interfered with the mobilisation of support in the Security Council for ratcheting up sanctions intended to coerce Iran into giving up its right to a complete nuclear fuel cycle. Such criticism of Turkey and Brazil for its engagement with peace diplomacy contrasts with its simultaneous tacit endorsement of the Israeli recourse to terrorist tactics in its efforts to destabilise Iran, or possibly to provoke Iran to the point that it retali-

ates, giving Tel Aviv the pretext it seems to be waiting for, to begin open warfare and exert pressure on the United States to join in a common effort.

Iran is being accused of moving toward a 'breakout' capability in relation to nuclear weapons, that is, possessing a combination of knowhow and enough properly enriched uranium to produce nuclear bombs within a matter of weeks, or at most months. Tehran has repeatedly denied any intention to become a nuclear weapons state, but has insisted all along that it has the same legal rights under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 as such other non-nuclear states as Germany and Japan, and this includes the right to have a complete nuclear fuel cycle, which entails enrichment capabilities and does imply a breakout capability. In the background, it should be realised that even the NPT contains a provision that allows a party to withdraw from the obligations under the treaty if it gives three months' notice and 'decides that extraordinary events... have jeopardised [its] supreme interests' (Article X). Such a provision, in effect, acknowledges the legal right of a country to determine its own security requirements in relation to nuclear weapons, a self-help right that the United States has exercised for decades with stunning irresponsibility that includes secrecy, a failure to pursue nuclear disarmament as it is obligated to do under the treaty, and a denial of all forms of international accountability. Israel, while not a party to the NPT, pursues a parallel path based purely on its belief that nuclear weapons contribute to its national security.

The real 'threat' posed by a hypothetical Iranian bomb is to Israel's regional monopoly over nuclear weapons, which means that there is no deterrent available in relation to Israel's projections of force beyond its borders. As three former Mossad directors have stated, even if Iran were to acquire a few nuclear bombs, Israel would still face no significant additional threat to its security or existence, as any attack or even threat

by Iran would be manifestly suicidal, and Tehran, despite some abysmal behaviour at home, has shown no such disposition toward recklessness in its foreign policy.

To be dispassionate commentators we need to ask ourselves whether Iran's posture toward its nuclear programme is unreasonable given this mix of circumstances. Is not Iran a sovereign state with the same right as other states to uphold its security and political independence when facing threats from its enemies who happen to be themselves armed with nuclear weapons? When was the last time that Iran resorted to force against a hostile neighbour? The surprising answer is, over 200 years ago! Can either of Iran's main antagonists claim a comparable record of living within their borders? Why does Iran not have the same right as other states to take full advantage of nuclear technology? And given Israeli hostility, terrorist assaults, and military capabilities that include a stockpile of sophisticated nuclear warheads, delivery style, and a record of preemptive war-making, would it not be reasonable for Iran to seek, and even obtain, a nuclear deterrent? True, the regime in Iran has been oppressive toward its domestic opposition and its president has expressed anti-Israeli views in inflammatory language (although exaggerated in the West), but, unlike Israel, without ever threatening or resorting to military action.

It should also be appreciated that Iran has consistently denied an intention to develop nuclear weaponry, and claims only an interest in using enriched uranium for medical research and nuclear energy. Even if there are grounds to be somewhat sceptical about these Iranian reassurances, given the grounds for suspicion that have been ambiguously and controversially validated by reports from the International Atomic Energy Agency, this still does not justify a campaign of punitive sanctions, much less threats backed up by deployments, war games, projected attack scenarios, and low-intensity warfare.

So far no prominent advocates of confrontation with Iran have been

willing to take into account the obvious relevance of Israel's nuclear weapons arsenal. Is not this actuality of unacknowledged nuclear weaponry possessed by Israel (200-300 warheads), which is being continuously upgraded and is coupled with the latest long-distance delivery capabilities, the most troublesome threat to regional stability and peace? At minimum, are not Israel's nuclear weapons highly relevant both for an appraisal of Iran's behaviour and for the wider agenda of regional stability? The United States and Israel behave in the Middle East as if the golden rule of international politics is totally inapplicable: in effect, that you can demand from others what you are unwilling to do yourself!

Consulting the recent history bearing on the counter-proliferation tactics relied upon in recent years by the United States gives rise to additional concerns. Iraq was attacked in 2003 partly because it did not have any nuclear weapons, while North Korea has been spared such a comparably horrific fate because it possesses a retaliatory capability that if used would inflict severe harm on neighbouring countries. If this experience relating to nuclear weapons is reasonably interpreted, it could dispose governments that have hostile relations with the West to opt for a nuclear weapons option as a prudent move so as to discourage attacks and interventions. Surely putting such reasoning into practice would not be good for the region, possibly igniting a devastating war, and almost certainly leading to the spread of nuclear weapons to other Middle Eastern countries.

Diplomacy of de-escalation

Instead of moving to coerce, punish, and frighten Iran in ways that are almost certain to increase the incentives of Iran and others to possess nuclear weaponry, it would seem prudent and in the mutual interest of all to foster a diplomacy of de-escalation and de-nuclearisation, a path that Iran has always signalled its willingness to pursue. And diplomatic alternatives to confrontation and war do exist, but

their plausibility requires a turn of the political imagination that seems totally absent in the capitals of hard-power geopolitics that seem entrapped in their military boxes.

It should be obvious to all but the most dogmatic warmongers that the path to peace and greater stability in the region depends on taking two steps long overdue, which have not up to this point even been widely debated in the media or in Congress: firstly, establishing a nuclear-free Middle East by a negotiated and monitored agreement that includes all states in the region, including Israel and Iran, and is coupled by a mutual pledge of non-aggression and commitment to collective security in the region; and secondly, an initiative promoted by the United Nations and backed by a consensus of its leading members to outline a just solution for the Israel/Palestine conflict that is consistent with Palestinian rights under international law, including the Palestinian right of self-determination, which if not accepted by Israel (and endorsed by the Palestinian people) within 12 months would result in the imposition of severe sanctions. Not only would such initiatives promote peace and prosperity for the Middle East, but such uses of diplomacy and law would serve the cause of justice by putting an end to both the warmongering of recent years and the totally unacceptable encroachment upon the rights of the Palestinian people, a process that goes back at least to 1947, and has since 1967 been intensified by the oppressive occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

These manifestly beneficial alternatives to sanctions and war are neither selected, nor even considered in the most influential corridors of opinion-making. Explaining this core dysfunctionality is simple: world order continues to be largely shaped by the rule of power rather than the rule of law or recourse to the realm of rights, and nowhere more so than in the Middle East, where the majority of the world's oil reserves are located, and where an expansionist Israel rejects a diplomacy of peace while sub-

jugating the Palestinian people to an unendurable ordeal.

Unfortunately, a geopolitical logic prevails in world politics, which means that inequality, hierarchy, and hard power control the thought and action of powerful governments and a compliant media and citizenry whenever strategic interests are at stake. Perhaps a glance at recent history offers the most convincing demonstration of the validity of this assessment: Western military interventions in Iraq and Libya, as well as the intimidating threats of attacks on Iran, the only three states in the region that have extensive oil reserves and regimes unfriendly to the West. Egypt and Tunisia, the first-born children of the Arab Spring, were undoubtedly politically advantaged by not being major oil-producing states, although Egypt is not as lucky as Tunisia because Israel and the United States worry that a more democratic Egyptian government might abandon or modify the 1979 peace treaty with Israel and show greater solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. Such fears, whether well grounded or not, lead external political actors to do what they can to prevent Cairo from moving in such anti-Western directions.

Fortunately, there is a growing, although still marginal, recognition in Washington that despite all the macho diplomacy of recent years, a military option is not really viable and would have disastrous side-effects. It would not likely achieve its objective of destroying Iran's nuclear capabilities, and it would actually push Iran toward removing any doubt about its intention to work toward the acquisition of nuclear weapons as the only way to keep their country from facing future military attacks. Beyond this, attacking Iran would almost certainly unleash immediate retaliatory responses, possibly blocking the Straits of Hormuz, which carry 20% of the world's traded oil, and possibly leading to direct missile strikes directed at Israel and some of the Gulf countries. Given such prospects, there is beginning to be some slight evidence that the West is at long last beginning to think that there might ex-

ist better alternatives than launching a hot war with Iran. But thinking outside the military box is still not very influential, and is belied by a new escalation of sanctions that commit the members of the European Union to boycott Iranian oil or face punitive consequences.

But so far this realisation that war is not the right answer is leading not to the pursuit of peaceful initiatives, but to a reliance on 'war' by other means. The long confrontation with Iran has developed its own momentum that makes any fundamental adjustment seem, to the United States and Israel, politically unacceptable and a show of weakness and geopolitical defeat. And so, as the prospect of a military attack is temporarily deferred for reasons of prudence, as Barak confirmed, in its place is put this intensified and escalating campaign of violent disruption, economic coercion, and outright terrorism. Such an ongoing effort to challenge Iran has produced a series of ugly and dangerous incidents that might at some point in the near future provoke a hostile Iranian reaction, generating a sequence of action and reaction that could plunge the region into a disastrous war that was never really intended but which would lead to a worldwide economic collapse as well as cause much suffering and devastation.

The main features of this disturbing pattern of low-intensity warfare are becoming clear, and are even being endorsed in liberal circles as 'a lesser evil'. This belligerent course of action that operates below the radar of public awareness is seen as less harmful to Western interests than an overt military attack, relying on a faulty Western consensus that there are no better alternatives than confrontation in some form. Israel, with apparent American collaboration, assassinates Iranian nuclear scientists and infects Iranian nuclear centrifuges used to enrich uranium with a disabling Stuxnet computer worm. There are documented reports that Mossad agents have even been posing as American covert operatives so as to recruit Iranians to join Jundallah, an

anti-regime terrorist organisation in Iran, to commit acts of violence against civilian targets, such as the 2009 attack on the mosque in Zahedan that killed 25 worshippers and wounded many others.

The *New York Times* in an editorial (13 January 2012) describes these tactics dispassionately without ever taking note of their objectionable moral or legal character: 'An accelerating covert campaign of assassinations, bombings, cyber attacks and defections – carried out mainly by Israel, according to the *Times* – is slowing [Iran's nuclear] programme, but whether that is enough is unclear.' The editorial observes that 'a military strike would be a disaster', yet this respected, supposedly moderate, editorial voice only questions whether such a pattern of covert warfare will get the necessary job done of preventing Iran from possessing a nuclear option sometime in the future, and never even alludes to Iran's sovereignty or rights under international law.

It should be obvious that if it was Iran that was engaging in similar tactics to disrupt Israeli military planning or to sabotage Israel's nuclear establishment, liberal opinion makers in the West would be screaming their denunciations of Iran's barbaric lawlessness. Such violations of Israel's sovereignty and international law would be certainly regarded in the West as unacceptable forms of provocation that would fully justify a major Israeli military response, and make the outbreak of war seem inevitable and unavoidable. Without mutuality there is no law, and certainly no justice!

And when Iran did recently understandably react to the drive to impose new international sanctions prohibiting the purchase of Iran's oil with a warning that it might then block passage of international shipping through the Straits of Hormuz, the United States reacted by sending additional naval vessels to the area and informing Tehran that any interference with international shipping would be crossing 'a red line' leading to US military action. It should be the occasion for moral trauma to realise

that assassinating nuclear scientists in Iran is okay with the arbiters of international behaviour while interfering with the global oil market crosses a war-provoking red line. Such self-serving distinctions are illustrative of the dirty work of geopolitics in the early 21st century.

To be sure, the situation is so worrisome that there are at last some prominent political figures who are publicly calling for a nuclear-free Middle East and a just settlement of the Israel/Palestine conflict, but even with credentials like long service in the CIA or US State Department, these calls are almost totally ignored by the mainstream discourse that sets rigid boundaries on the scope of policy debate in the United States and Israel. When some peaceful alternatives are set forth, as with the preferred options mentioned here, they are usually hedged by being presented as more feasible and less costly ways of inducing Iran to give up its legal entitlement to develop a complete nuclear fuel cycle. Of course, one welcomes proposals to find a way out of this deepening crisis other than war. Perhaps prudence will yet prevail over bluster and bluff, and the military option will be renounced and war avoided, but even with such a positive outcome, this dangerous war talk accompanied by deployments should awaken public opinion to the unacceptability of leaving regional and global security subject to geopolitical management. It is time for a bottom-up, people-oriented approach that emphasises the imperatives of human security.

I am afraid that this can only happen if and when a yet non-existent Global Occupy Movement is fully mobilised and turns its attention to geopolitics and global democracy. Only then can the peoples of the Middle East begin to have some reason to hope for a peaceful, just, and promising future for their region, and beyond. ♦

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Fingers itch for a war on Iran

The shooting may not have started, but if you ask Iranians they will tell you that the West's war against Iran has already begun. *Vijay Prashad* explains why.

IF you ask Iranians, they will tell you that the war against Iran has already begun. Some will take you back to 1953, when the US fired its first shot across the bow, taking out a democratically elected government in a CIA coup. Others will point to the political and financial subvention given to Saddam Hussein by the Atlantic states and the Gulf emirs to invade Iran and crush the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Millions died in that futile war, whose conclusion left a battered Saddam turning to the Gulf Arabs, an unpaid bill in hand. It was the Gulf Arab reticence to pay up that led to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the full-scale entry of US troops into Saudi Arabia (which enraged Osama Bin Laden and his minions) and into a decades-long war against Iraq (1991-2011). This is all true as context: there has been a longstanding animosity between the Atlantic powers and Iranian democratic ambitions.

Iran's democratic heritage extends backwards to its great Constitutional Revolution (1905-06) that raised the spirits of a resurgent Asia. The British and the Russians signed an entente to strangle the revolution. The British Ambassador to Tehran, Sir Cecil Spring Rice, wrote to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, 'We are regarded as having betrayed the Persian people.' That assessment remains to this day.

More recently, the Atlantic world has conducted a war against Iran on three fronts:

Diplomatic. Having knocked out Iran's two neighbouring adversaries (Saddam Hussein and the Taliban) by 2003, the United States delivered Tehran an enormous gift. The new regimes in Kabul and Baghdad had close ties to the Iranians, and the latter were prepared to exert themselves to help bring some measure of stability to their neighbours. But the Bush administration would have none of it.

It saw Iran through the eyes of Tel Aviv, as the Great Satan to be given its deliverance. To that end, the Bush administration began a diplomatic campaign to isolate Iran.

What this required was to try futilely to shut out the Iranians from their neighbours. It also required that Iran be isolated from the Global South. The lever there was to break India's close solidarity with Iran. In 2005, then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice travelled to India to offer to bring New Delhi out of the nuclear cold and recognise its nuclear programme if India voted with the United States in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) meetings against Iran. Not being a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and having conducted an 'illegal' nuclear test in 1998, India had been boxed into automatic sanctions. The US deal was tremendous: it not only ended the sanctions but enabled India to secure a 'legal' stream of uranium from the Nuclear Suppliers Group. India voted against Iran, and the US signed a strategic alignment treaty with India. These two gestures isolated Iran in the Non-Aligned Movement (where India continues to hold sway) and created tensions between India and Pakistan (which was carrying the heavy water for the US in the Afghan War and saw this new treaty as a betrayal by the US). In its determination to isolate Iran diplomatically, the US raised the tension level in South Asia.

'Through the power of our diplomacy,' Obama said in his 2012 State of the Union address, 'a world that was once divided about how to deal with Iran's nuclear programme now stands as one.' A caged lion is not necessarily pacified.

Economic. Sanctions by the Atlantic powers against Iran are not new, but the newest sanctions by the US (signed by Obama on 31 December)

and by the Europeans (signed by EU foreign ministers on 23 January) are designed to bring the Iranian economy to its knees. The Iranian rial dropped its value against the dollar by over 70% in January. A currency trader in Tehran told Reuters, 'The rate is changing every second. We are not taking in any rials to change to dollars or any other foreign currency.' Imports have slowed to a trickle, and with the European oil sanctions to set in, it is likely that exports will also decrease. French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé pretended that the sanctions are a means to forestall war: 'To avoid any military confrontation, which could have irreparable consequences, we have decided to go further down the path of sanctions.' Just over 18% of Iranian oil exports go to Europe.

As if by clockwork, oil prices began to rise against the dollar. But oil analysts know that this is not a long-term problem. Samuel Ciszuk of KBC Energy Economics notes, 'Volumes from Iraq should be up significantly, Libya is doing very well and Saudi Arabia will increase production to compensate for some of the lost Iranian barrels.' NATO's wars have turned the pipelines of Iraq and Libya toward Europe and the United States. They will more than compensate for lost Iranian oil. The rise in price will continue (four month Brent hovers at \$110 a barrel) not because Iranian oil might be offline but because the US Federal Reserve keeps the greenback weak and so allows dollar-denominated commodities such as crude oil to be cheaper for those who buy it in euros or yen. Oil prices are up for speculative reasons, not because of geopolitics. But the economic sanctions against Iran are painful nonetheless, destroying the ability of the people to survive at the levels to which they have become accustomed.

Covert. Since 2010, four nuclear scientists in Iran have been mysteriously killed. In January 2010, explosives stashed in a motorcycle exploded as Professor Masud Ali Mohammadi of the Department of Physics at the University of Tehran left his house in the Gheytaieh neighbourhood. He was an expert in quantum field theory and elementary particle physics. In November 2010, Professor Majid Shahriari, who worked at the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran, was killed when motorcycle-riding assassins attached magnetic bombs to his car. A separate attack that day injured Professor Fereydoun Abbasi, now head of the Atomic Energy Organisation. In July 2011, Dariush Rezaeinejad was shot dead as he waited to pick up his child from daycare. He worked at KN Toosi University of Technology in electrical engineering as well as the Atomic Energy Organisation. Finally, on 11 January 2012, a motorcycle-riding assassin attached a magnetic bomb to the car of Mustafa Ahmadi Roshan, a scientist at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility.

It was the killing of 32-year-old Roshan that raised the eyebrows of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who told the press in Beirut, 'Any terrorist action or assassination of any people, whether scientist or civilian, is to be strongly condemned. It is not acceptable. Human rights must be protected.' Emphasis should be on the words 'of any people'; after all, what is being denied is that people like the Iranians have rights in any shape or form.

Four days after Roshan's assassination, the *Sunday Times* (London) reported that these killings are part of 'Israel's secret war'. One Israeli source told the reporters, Uzi Mahnaimi and Marie Colvin, 'The killings were merely a precursor to a military strike, not merely an alternative, to make it more difficult for Iran to rebuild facilities if they are bombed.' The US and Israel, it has been alleged, attacked Iranian computer facilities in 2010 with the Stuxnet worm, a cyberweapon that disabled the centrifuges that Iranian

scientists use to enrich uranium. Ralph Langner, the scientist who identified the Stuxnet, said in February 2011, 'My opinion is that Mossad is involved but that the leading force is not Israel. The leading force behind Stuxnet is the cyber superpower – there is only one, and that's the United States.'

The war is on, and as pressure on Iran mounts, there is a temptation for the Iranians to lash out, to close the Straits of Hormuz for instance. If they do so, the Atlantic powers, the Israelis and the Gulf Arabs will take this as a *casus belli*. It will be enough to power up the cruise missile delivery systems. The political benefits for the US and Israel of such an attack are great. As Rami El-Amin puts it, 'An attack or possible war on Iran would have the added effect of derailing the Arab revolutions and revolts and justify the continued presence of a large US military force in the oil-rich region.'

If a shooting war begins, establishment intellectuals will return to the television sets, long faces and small mouths telling us about the warlike culture of the Arabs and the Persians. Trans-Atlantic accents will tickle the sensibility of the listener who is comforted to hear that the Arabs and the Persians are not prepared for democracy; give it to them and their inner hate will erupt in theocracies that threaten the 'only democracy in the Middle East', Israel, whose longevity is to be guaranteed by F16s and an exclusive nuclear umbrella. Since Arabs are congenitally undemocratic, it will be acceptable to laud the emirs of the Gulf for their judicious stewardship of an overly emotional people.

Fears in the capitals of China, India and Russia have begun to grow. To break the sanctions, both Beijing and New Delhi have offered to buy Iranian oil and pay for it in gold (or in yen). The Russians indicated that they would offer Iran a defensive shield against a full-scale attack. These are not reliable friends. India has already voted against Iran in the IAEA, and China and Russia have gone along with sanctions when they

have been pressured by the US.

Iran's response to these provocations has been remarkably sober. As a member of the NPT, Iran can legally develop a nuclear energy programme. It has been reasonably open to investigations by the IAEA, whose strongest note in its November 2011 report was that 'Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear device'. This is not a smoking gun. On 8 January, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta mused, 'Are they trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No. But we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that's what concerns us.' But a 'nuclear capability' is not outside what is permissible for an NPT member state.

There is no hope that Iran will voluntarily curtail its nuclear ambiguity. The first reason is that it lives in a neighbourhood with Israel, which is reported to possess 200 nuclear warheads, a stash that is part of its illegal nuclear programme that is outside IAEA scrutiny – but no one seems abashed by the hypocrisy. The second reason is that nuclear ambiguity gives Iran a measure of insurance. 'The Iranians have no doubt taken note of two recent and relevant case studies: North Korea and Libya,' writes Ahmed Moor. 'Kim Jong-Il died of natural causes. Muammar Gaddafi did not.' North Korea is a nuclear-weapons state; Libya gave up its nuclear programme in 2004. Pressure on Iran absent a drawdown of the US's aggressive military posture will not result in an end to the Iranian nuclear programme. To demand it is tantamount to goose-stepping to war.

When there will be a shooting war, it shall not be a mistake nor shall it be out of necessity. It will be calculated and vicious, and the onus for it shall rest as it often does...on Washington. ♦

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Growing elite opposition to military option against Iran

After the bitter experience of Iraq, there appears to be growing unease even within the US political establishment about a war against Iran.

Jim Lobe

LIKE the imminent prospect of one's hanging, to paraphrase the 18th century British essayist Dr (Samuel) Johnson, the suddenly looming possibility of war can concentrate the mind wonderfully.

If that aphorism didn't apply in the run-up to the US invasion of Iraq 10 years ago, it appears to be the case now for key sectors of the US foreign-policy elite – notably, liberal hawks who supported the Iraq war – with regard to the sharp rise in tensions between Iran and both the US and Israel.

Amid a crescendo of threats by senior Israeli officials to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, the murder, presumably by Mossad, of a fourth Iranian nuclear scientist in the past several years, and a sharp escalation of Western economic sanctions designed to 'cripple' Iran's economy, Tehran's threat to close the Straits of Hormuz brought the until-then hypothetical possibility of war – whether by design, provocation or accident – sharply into view.

The hawkish declarations by Republican presidential candidates eager to prove their love for Israel to Christian fundamentalists and Jewish voters and donors didn't help, nor did a renewed and intensified drumbeat for 'regime change' by some of the same neo-conservatives from institutions like the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies (FDD) that led the drive to war in Iraq.

Adding to the sense that war was suddenly a very real possibility, these events more or less coincided with the publication by the influential *Foreign Affairs* journal of an article entitled



US troops on patrol in Baghdad, 2008. Several prominent liberal interventionists who had supported the US invasion of Iraq are now warning against further escalation by the US or Israel of tensions with Iran.

'Time to Attack Iran: Why a Strike Is the Least Bad Option'.

It advocated a limited and carefully calibrated US aerial attack on Iran's air defences and nuclear sites, and was authored by an academic, Matthew Kroenig, who had just completed a one-year stint as a strategic analyst in the office of the secretary of defence.

Calls for calm

The confluence of all these developments provoked a number of influential members of the foreign policy establishment – including several prominent liberal interventionists who had supported the Iraq war – to warn against any further escalation either by the US or Israel.

'We're doing this terrible thing all over again,' wrote Leslie Gelb, the president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, the think-tank that publishes *Foreign Affairs*, in the *Daily Beast*, in an appeal for Senate hearings on the implications of war with

Iran.

'As before, we're letting a bunch of ignorant, sloppy-thinking politicians and politicised foreign-policy experts draw "red line" ultimatums. As before, we're letting them quick-march us off to war,' warned Gelb, a repentant Iraq-war hawk, about the chorus of neo-conservatives and other hawks with whom he had previously been aligned.

On the pages of *The New Republic*, Kenneth Pollack, a former top CIA analyst at the Brookings Institution whose 2002 book, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq*, was cited frequently by liberal hawks before the war, not only argued against any further escalation, but also suggested that the sanctions track on which the Barack Obama administration and the European Union have increasingly relied was proving counter-productive.

'The problem is that these sanctions [against the Central Bank of Iran] are potentially so damaging that they could backfire,' he wrote, citing

their possible negative impact on the West's own struggling economies and the difficulty of sustaining them diplomatically over time if they resulted in the kind of 'humanitarian catastrophe' inflicted by the sanctions regime against Iraq from 1992 until the invasion.

Moreover, he went on, '...the more we turn up the heat on Iran, the more Iran will fight back, and the way they like to fight back could easily lead to unintended escalation. Doubtless such a war would leave Iran far, far worse off than it would leave us. But it would be painful for us too, and it might last far longer than anyone wants...'

Meanwhile, another influential liberal hawk, Princeton Prof. Anne-Marie Slaughter, argued in project-syndicate.org that the West and Iran were playing a 'dangerous game' of 'chicken' and that the West's current course 'leaves Iran's government no alternative between publicly backing down, which it will not do, and escalating its provocations'.

'The more publicly the West threatens Iran, the more easily Iranian leaders can portray America as the Great Satan to parts of the Iranian population that have recently been inclined to see the US as their friend,' wrote Slaughter, who stepped down as director of the policy planning office under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

'It is time for cooler heads to prevail with a strategy that helps Iran step back,' she added, suggesting that the aborted Turkish-Brazilian 2010 effort at mediation between the P5+1 and Iran be revived.

Yet another Iraq hawk, *New York Times* columnist Bill Keller, attacked the *Foreign Affairs* article, assuring his readers that Kroenig's former colleagues at the Pentagon 'were pretty appalled by his article, which combines the alarmist worst case of the Iranian nuclear threat with the rosiest best case of America's ability to make things better'.

Contrary to Kroenig's predictions, Keller wrote, '...an attack on Iran is almost certain to unify the Iranian people around the mullahs and provoke the supreme leader to redouble Iran's nuclear pursuits, only



An anti-Iran demonstration in the US. Calls for a military strike against Iran have raised concern among a number of influential members of the US foreign policy establishment.



Leslie Gelb (pic), president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, has appealed for Senate hearings on the implications of war with Iran.

deeper underground, and without international inspectors around. Over at the Pentagon, you sometimes hear it put this way: Bombing Iran is the best way to guarantee exactly what we are trying to prevent.'

Indeed, in a reply to Kroenig entitled 'Not Time to Attack Iran', Colin Kahl, who had also just left the Pentagon at the end of December after two years as the head of Middle East policy, argued that Kroenig's 'picture of a clean, calibrated conflict is a mirage. Any war with Iran would be a messy and extraordinarily violent affair, with significant casualties and consequences.'

Among other objections, Kahl, a senior fellow at the hawkish Center

for a New American Security (CNAS), predicted that a pre-emptive strike of the kind promoted by Kroenig could well spark a regional war, solidify popular support for the regime in Tehran, and transform 'the Arab Spring's populist anti-regime narrative into a decidedly anti-American one'.

Indeed, much of Kahl's analysis was subsequently backed up by Gen. Michael Hayden (ret.), who, as the head of the Central Intelligence Agency during George W Bush's second term, could hardly be called a liberal.

According to the 'Cable' blog on foreignpolicy.com, Hayden, who served as the head of the Pentagon's National Security Agency from 1999 to 2005, told a small group convened at the Center for National Interest in January that top Bush national security officials had concluded that a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities – whether by Israel or the US – would be counter-productive.

The Israelis, he reportedly said, 'aren't going to [attack Iran]... They can't do it, it's beyond their capacity. They only have the ability to make this [problem of Iran's nuclear programme] worse.'

And while the US has the ability to mount a campaign, it could only serve as a short-term fix. 'What's move two, three, four or five down the board? I don't think anyone is talking about occupying anything.' – IPS

NYT hypes Israeli attack on Iran

The Western media has been playing a significant role in providing credibility to those making out a case for an Israeli attack on Iran. *Ira Chernus* highlights the case of the *New York Times Magazine*.

IT'S an impressive piece of art: the cover of the 29 January *New York Times Magazine*. 'ISRAEL VS. IRAN', spelled out in charred black lettering, with flame and smoke still rising from 'IRAN', as if the great war were already over. Below those large lurid letters is the little subtitle: 'When Will It Erupt?' – not 'if', but 'when', as if it were inevitable. Though the article itself is titled 'Will Israel Attack Iran?', author Ronen Bergman, military analyst for Israel's largest newspaper, leaves no doubt of his answer: 'Israel will indeed strike Iran in 2012.'

Bergman does cite some compelling arguments against an Israeli strike from former heads of Mossad (Israel's CIA). And he makes it clear that no attack can prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons if it wants them. Everyone agrees on that. The argument is only about whether an attack would delay the Iranian programme by a few years or just a few months.

Nevertheless, his article stacks the deck in favour of supposedly persuasive reasons for Israel to act. It's almost a hymn of praise to what one Jewish Israeli scholar has called Iranophobia, an irrational fear promoted by the Jewish state because 'Israel needs an existential threat.' Why? To sustain the myth that shapes its national identity: the myth of Israel's insecurity.

That myth comes out clearly in Bergman's conclusion: Israel will attack Iran because of a 'peculiar Israeli mixture of fear – rooted in the sense that Israel is dependent on the tacit support of other nations to survive – and tenacity, the fierce conviction, right or wrong, that only the Israelis can ultimately defend themselves'.

Fear of what? Defend against whom? It doesn't really matter. Israeli



US President Barack Obama speaking at the 2011 policy conference of the pro-Israel lobby group AIPAC. '[A]s long as the myth of Israel's insecurity pervades American political life, an incumbent desperate to get re-elected just might feel forced to let the Israelis attack Iran.'

political life has always been built on the premise that Israel's very existence is threatened by some new Hitler bent on destroying the Jewish people. How can Israel prove that Jews can defend themselves if there's no anti-Semitic 'evildoer' to fight against?

So here is Israel's Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, talking to Bergman about Iran's 'desire to destroy Israel'. Proof? Who needs it? It's taken for granted.

In fact, in accurate translations of anti-Israel diatribes from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, there's no mention of destroying or even harming Jews, nor any threat of war. There's only a clear call for a one-state solution: replacing a distinctly Jewish state, which privileges its Jewish citizens and imposes military occupation on Palestinians, with a single political entity from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

Guess who else called for exactly the same resolution to the conflict: the most renowned Jewish thinker of the 20th century, Martin Buber. Plenty of Israeli Jews keep Buber's vision alive today, offering cogent (though debatable) arguments that a one-state solu-

tion would be in the best interests of Jews as well as Palestinians.

Beyond belief

Yet Ronen Bergman and the editors of the *New York Times Magazine* see no need for their readers to encounter these facts.

Nor do they see any need to mention the most important fact of all, the one most flagrantly missing from Bergman's long article: No matter what Iran's leaders might desire, it's beyond belief that they would ever launch a single nuke against Israel. They know full well that it would be national suicide. Israel has at least 100 nukes, and 200 or more by many estimates, all ready to be used in a counter-attack.

Which makes it hard not to laugh when Bergman reports Ehud Barak's other arguments for attacking Iran. Even if Iran doesn't intend to kill all the Jews, 'the moment Iran goes nuclear, other countries in the region will feel compelled to do the same'. That's the foolish 'stop a Middle East nuclear arms race' argument we hear so often coming out of Washington, too – as if Israel had not already started the Middle East nuclear arms race decades ago.

And how can a supposedly serious journalist like Bergman solemnly repeat the latest popular argument of the Iranophobes: A nuclear-armed Iran (in Barak's words) 'offers an entirely different kind of protection to its proxies', Hezbollah and Hamas. That 'would definitely restrict our range of operations' in any war against those so-called 'proxies'.

As if Iran would even consider committing national suicide to serve the interests of any Lebanese or Palestinian factions.

Yet the myth of 'poor little Israel, surrounded by fanatic enemies bent

on destroying it' is so pervasive here in the US, most readers might easily take this Iranophobic article at face value, forgetting the absurd premises underlying all arguments that Israel 'must' attack Iran.

US response

What American readers think is key here. Most Israelis do believe that (as Bergman puts it) Israel needs 'the support of other nations to survive'. It's a crucial piece of their myth of insecurity. And the only nation that really supports them anymore is the US. So Israel won't attack Iran without a green light from Washington.

Bergman glibly asserts that there's some 'unspoken understanding that America should agree, at least tacitly, to Israeli military actions'. For years, though, a torrent of reports from Washington have all agreed that both the White House and the Pentagon, under both the Bush and Obama administrations, would refuse to support an Israeli attack on Iran. The consequences for the US are too drastic to even consider it. Why should that change now?

Bergman's article ignores the obvious answer, the most crucial missing piece in his picture: Barack Obama wants to get re-elected nine months from now. Despite what the headlines tell us, he doesn't really have to worry about pleasing hawkish Jewish opinion. Most American Jews want him to work harder for peaceful settlements in the Middle East.

What Obama does have to worry about is Republicans using words like these (which Bergman tucks into his article as if he were paid by the GOP): 'The Obama administration has abandoned any aggressive strategy that would ensure the prevention of a nuclear Iran and is merely playing a game of words to appease them.' Only a dyed-in-the-wool Iranophobe would believe the charge that Obama is an 'appeaser', but we are already hearing it from his would-be opponents.

Obama also has to worry about fantasies like the one Bergman offers (apparently in all seriousness) of Ira-

nian operatives smuggling nukes into Texas. Republicans will happily spread that story, too.

All of this could be laughed off as absurdity if the American conversation about Israel were based on reality. Israel, the Middle East's only nuclear power now and for the foreseeable future, is perfectly safe from Iranian attack. Indeed, Israel is safe from any attack, as the strength of its (largely US-funded) military and the history of its war success proves.

But as long as the myth of Isra-

el's insecurity pervades American political life, an incumbent desperate to get re-elected just might feel forced to let the Israelis attack Iran. The only thing that would stand in the way is a better-informed American electorate. Apparently that's not what the *New York Times Magazine* sees as its mission. ♦

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Israeli public supports Middle East nuclear-free zone

A NEW poll of Israeli Jews finds that 64% favour establishing a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East, even when it was spelled out that this would mean that Israel as well as Iran would give up the option of having nuclear weapons.

Pressure has grown for such a nuclear-free zone in response to the potential for Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon, possibly leading to a regional arms race. In 2012 the United Nations will sponsor a conference devoted to trying to get the possibility of a Middle East nuclear-free zone back into play, but the Israeli government continues to resist the idea.

The logic of the Israeli Jewish public is clear. Less than half (43%) say they support an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Recently, even leading voices within Israel's defence community have said that such a strike would merely slow but not stop Iran and that Israeli cities would be vulnerable to retaliation.

At the same time the Israeli public is far from sanguine about Iran's potential for acquiring nuclear weapons. An overwhelming 90% say that it is likely that Iran will eventually acquire nuclear weapons.

Asked which would be better – for both Israel and Iran to have nuclear weapons, or for neither to have nuclear weapons – a robust 65% say that it would be better for neither to have them. Only 19% say it would be better for both to have them.

The poll of 510 Israeli Jews is a joint project of the Programme on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA)

and the Anwar Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland, and was fielded by the Dahaf Institute in Israel. Interviews were conducted by telephone during 10-16 November. The margin of error is +/-4.3%.

The results were released in conjunction with the start of the Saban Forum on US-Israeli Relations at the Brookings Institution.

Highly significant to negotiations with Iran, Israeli Jews expressed support not only for the long-term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons from the region but also for an interim step of making their nuclear facilities transparent together with Iran.

Asked about having all countries in the region, including Israel as well as Iran, 'agree to have a system of full international inspections of all facilities where nuclear components could be built or maintained', 60% favoured it.

'If Israel and Iran were to indicate a readiness to join a process toward turning the Middle East into a nuclear-free zone this would be a major game changer in negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme,' comments Steven Kull, director of PIPA.

'I find the findings surprising given the long-held assumption that the Israeli public is not prepared to even discuss the nuclear issue given their deep-seated sense of insecurity,' adds Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development.

—
WorldPublicOpinion.org (1 December 2011)

The media informs us – about American idols

While not focusing exclusively on the Iranian crisis, *Saul Landau* highlights the failure of the ‘free press’ to play its proper role in checking the abuse of power in decision-making on key issues of war and peace by ensuring transparency.

‘Daddy,’ the little boy on the bus asks, ‘what park is that?’

‘I don’t know.’

Two blocks later: ‘Who’s the man in that statue?’

‘Beats me.’

‘What’s that big building with the point on top?’

‘I haven’t a clue.’

‘Dad, does it bother you if I keep asking questions?’

‘If you don’t ask questions how will you learn?’

WE once learned that a free press would protect the public from shady government and business operations. The stereotyped journalist oozed scepticism and curiosity; got in the face of the powerful with tough questions. Reporters embodied courage to provide the transparency needed for democracy.

However, rather than informing the public on what led them into war in Iraq – and maybe Iran – ‘experts’ analyse Gingrich’s lunacy (Moon colony?) or Romney’s wealth. The modern media inundates us with Angelina’s problems, Jennifer’s marital spats and Lindsay’s addictions, while acting as stenographer for the ‘national security’ elite.

Lack of context

When we get ‘facts’ they come without proper context. On 10 January, for example, an assassin’s bomb killed an Iranian nuclear scientist; three previous scientists were assassinated since 2010. Iran accused Israel’s Mossad. Israeli Brigadier General Yoav Mordechai posted on Facebook: ‘I don’t know who settled the score with the Iranian scientist, but I certainly am not shedding a tear.’

(Mehdi Hasan, *Guardian*, 16 January, 2012)

US media didn’t press Israeli officials about moral differences between ‘Palestinian terrorism’ (occasional rockets landing in Israel) and Israeli government-sponsored assassinations.

Did they press Washington’s elite as to whether they approved of the hit? Israeli officials and their US policy fan club dismissed the incident as ho-hum, routine counter-terrorism.

Reporters understand that applying the ‘t’ word to Israel constitutes a bad career choice. They’d get charged with being anti-Semitic. The media breaks hot stories about athletes and actors, but actually abetted Bush when he used the WMD (weapons of mass destruction) issue to justify his invasion of Iraq. (See Judith Miller’s 2002-03 *New York Times* ‘scoop’ stories.) Nor did they push President Obama on his orders to execute – no judicial process – un-indicted US citizens in Yemen last year. The media instead inures us by reprinting security prattle like ‘targeted killings’. Instead of describing executive assassinations as terrorism – or, God forbid, murder – media ‘experts’ debate the fine points between defence and atrocity. President Obama only ‘targets’ enemies – Muslims who kill innocents. Well, a few mistakes were made...

Almost alone among mainstream journalists Andrew Sullivan asked: ‘Is not the group or nation responsible for the murder of civilians in another country terrorists?’ (‘The Terrorism We Support’, *The Daily Beast*, 11 January 2012)

Which reporter asks: ‘What did Iran do to us again to merit the harsh sanctions, threats and nastiness? Did

they overthrow our government as the CIA and MI6 did theirs in 1953? Did they install a King (Shah) in Washington who practised repression and torture – until Iranians overthrew him in 1979?’

Some apparent terrorism doesn’t fit the Muslim mould. Christians did the 1995 Oklahoma Federal Building bombing. Indeed, army veteran Timothy McVeigh had registered Republican, belonged to the National Rifle Association and got confirmed in a Catholic church. Terrorists? No, extremists, vengeance seekers, bitter guys.

‘Freedom fighters’

Take the case of ‘freedom fighters’. ‘American prosecutors presented evidence in open court that Mr [Luis] Posada [Carriles] – a man originally trained in explosives by the CIA – played a major role in carrying out bombings in Cuba.’ In a 2011 trial in El Paso, ‘the government presented material showing he had participated in a campaign of bombings in Cuba.’ (*New York Times*, 11 April 2011) But prosecutors charged Posada with lying to immigration officials, not terrorism. A confused jury acquitted him.

In January, Posada keynoted a Miami ceremony honouring Jose Marti. The man identified in declassified US documents as masterminding the 1976 bombing of a Cuban passenger plane (73 died) gets feted as a Cuban ‘freedom fighter’. Imagine Marti advocating bombing a civilian airliner!

Indiana Congressman Dan Burton (R-IN) and Ileana Ros Lehtinen (R-FL) attended Posada’s performance along with former Panamanian President Mireya Moscoso,

who had pardoned Posada and cronies in a 2000 conviction for planning to assassinate Fidel Castro in Panama. Moscoso would repeat the deed if she could, she said. Reporters omitted to mention that Moscoso coincidentally had also received a \$4 million deposit in her offshore account. For that price lots of people would proudly repeat unethical acts.

Terrorism theme

Without media questioning, the national security elite monopolise the terrorism theme. Israel and the US accuse their enemies of terrorism, while practising assassinations and deadly drone strikes. In 2009 Ros Lehtinen said she 'would welcome anyone who wanted to assassinate Fidel Castro'. And she didn't get tossed into Guantanamo for advocating the assassination of a foreign leader – from her congressional office.

Israel fears Iran will develop a nuclear weapon via the very secret process Israel chose. Indeed, Israel bombed Syria and Iraqi nuclear installations to stop their attempts to do what Israel did.

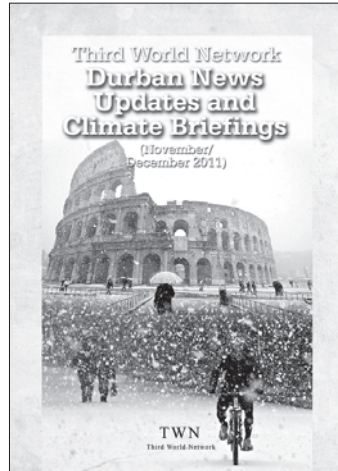
In April 1963, President Kennedy asked Israeli Premier Shimon Peres about nuclear intentions. Peres lied: 'I can tell you forthrightly that we will not introduce atomic weapons into the region. We certainly won't be the first to do so. We have no interest in that. On the contrary, our interest is in de-escalating the armament tension, even in total disarmament.' (Barry Lando, 'The Iran Crisis: Only Half the Story', Blog, 2 February 2012)

Israel's nukes receive scant media attention. When an Iranian scientist gets whacked, the media shrugs. After all, everyone knows, Israel had to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuke. Israel only has 200 of them. Would a career-minded reporter ask about such contradictions? If he doesn't ask how will he (we) learn? ♦

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From Malouines to Falklands

There is more than plain hypocrisy involved in the British Premier's recent charge of 'colonialism' against Argentina for laying claim to the Falkland Islands, says *Jeremy Seabrook*.

UNTIL 1982, the British 'possession' of the Malvinas in the south Atlantic was a matter of such indifference to the people of Britain that surveys, conducted soon after the re-taking of the islands by Argentina, suggested a majority thought the 'Falklands' were situated somewhere near the coast of Scotland. Ignorance, however, has rarely posed an obstacle to indignation or patriotic fervour.

These islands have a long history. 'Discovered' in the 16th century, the unoccupied territory was 'explored' in 1690 by an Englishman. French sailors from St Malo colonised them – hence their name, Malouines in French, Malvinas in Spanish. The Spanish ejected the French in the mid-18th century, and a small British colony was abandoned in 1774. In 1820, Argentina, free from Spain, started a settlement, which lasted until 1833, when the British seized the islands, evicted the Argentines, peopled them with British 'migrants' and maintained control until 1982.

The people of Britain, largely unaware of the site of their distant possession, were soon to be instructed by their wise leader, Margaret Thatcher, who, following the recapture of the even more desolate territory of South Georgia by the British, appeared on the threshold of Downing Street in a spirit of high exultation, urging her compatriots to 'Rejoice'. This was swiftly followed by the dispatch of a 'task force' to re-take the islands from the then rulers of Argentina, a junta headed by the unappetising figure of General Galtieri. Efforts at mediation by international powers could not prevent the Falklands War, with its tragic sacrifice of life for the great patriotic glory of Thatcher (who, deeply unpopular, nevertheless won the 1983 election by a landslide) and the chastisement of the Argentine military, the fall of



Argentine prisoners of war returning home after the 1982 Falklands War against Britain. The conflict was, proportionately, by far the bloodiest war ever fought by Britain.

Galtieri and the re-establishment of civilian government.

In the run-up to the 30th anniversary of the 1982 war, news that a mock invasion by Argentine fishermen was planned provoked an astonishing outburst by British Prime Minister David Cameron, who warned the Argentine authorities that any attempt to reclaim the islands would be an act of 'colonialism'. The Ministry of Defence had 'contingency plans' to defend them. Cameron had convened a National Security Council summit for the express purpose of discussing military protection of the islands. It was also announced that Prince William is to be posted there as a search-and-rescue pilot.

The Malvinas remain a British Overseas Territory. Its GDP is around \$100 million. Its tiny population (less than 3,000), an outpost of archaic British imperial enthusiasm, in its desire for 'self-determination', declared itself committed in perpetuity

to remaining British. British enthusiasm for the sacred principle of self-determination here was certainly not matched by its response to the inhabitants of Diego Garcia, also a British Overseas Territory, who had to be evicted in 1971 because the United States wanted the island as a military base. And this high ideal is not matched everywhere else in the world where Britain has been swift to delegitimize the desires of others – Palestinians or Kurds for instance – for self-determination.

The struggle over the Malvinas in 1982 was recast by the British (as every dispute with authoritarian foreigners has been) as a replay of the war against Hitler. In a memorable phrase, Thatcher announced to the world, in defiance of history, 'We do not appease dictators.'

And so the situation has remained for 30 years. The British have expanded 'facilities', including an airport, called Mount Pleasant. Fishing,



Responding to a planned symbolic 'landing' by Argentine fishermen on the Falklands, British Prime Minister David Cameron (*pic*) warned the Argentine authorities that any attempt to reclaim the islands would be an act of 'colonialism'.



The Falklands remain a British Overseas Territory. '[P]roprietorship of this piece of surreal-estate in the south Atlantic gives Britain a right to share in the bountiful resources of the region.'

tourism and agriculture have made the islands 'self-sufficient' in everything but defence. Cruise-ships carrying more passengers than people who live on the islands, now frequently call at Port Stanley.

Even in 1982, it was a matter of some incredulity that more than 900 lives had been sacrificed over the ownership of a few rocks some 12,000 miles from the 'home' country – the equivalent of one life for every three occupants of those fortunate isles. This was, proportionately, by far the bloodiest war ever fought by a Britain whose leaders evince such an enduring fondness for armed conflict.

Cameron's outburst – also a flagrant denial of history – was profoundly indicative of that elusive quality, his 'real' feelings, which are, for the most part, successfully enveloped in the ectoplasm of his public-relations persona. That a leader of what has been the most ruthless practitioner of imperialism in history should accuse Argentina of colonialism, a country which has itself scarcely been untouched by Britain's imperial adventures (particularly during the Napoleonic Wars), suggests a rewriting of history worthy of any totalitarian state.

Secondly, his dedication to the legacy of Thatcher is such that he perhaps dreams of rekindling the patriotic fervour which she evoked in the people by arousing their somnolent dreams of supremacy when Britain's

navy crossed the world in April 1982 to quell the errant Argies. Perhaps he even yearns for a repeat of that wild access of popularity when his idol, Britain's warrior-queen, swept all before her in the 1983 election. There is, after all, nothing like a good war for electoral purposes, particularly one in which a feeble enemy can be elevated into a major threat to our security.

But none of this touches the most crucial reason for Britain's adherence

That a leader of the most ruthless practitioner of imperialism in history should accuse Argentina of colonialism, suggests a rewriting of history worthy of any totalitarian state.

to this offshore corner of the world that is forever England. The interdiction by Mercosur (the agreement between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, signed in 1991, to promote trade and the interests of its member states) of ships flying the flag of the Falkland Islands, reminds him that the leaders of South America are

far from the tyrants, juntas and strongmen they were 30 years ago. Its growing economic and political power ought to prompt a new restraint and sobriety on Britain's part. Instead, Cameron falls back upon menaces that no longer make the world tremble. But the imperial nostalgia is not gratuitous: proprietorship of this piece of surreal-estate in the south Atlantic gives Britain a right to share in the bountiful resources of the region, including Antarctica, especially on that happy day when the polar ice-cap retreats, leaving exposed the millennial treasures which will then be ours for the taking.

This is why the apparent petulance of Cameron's response to what was to have been a purely symbolic 'landing' by fishermen, perhaps to place flags on the Malvinas and South Georgia, should not be taken at face value. That he could so readily elevate it into something resembling a *casus belli*, suggests how little is changed in a Britain where leaders can so readily tap into ancient xenophobias and misplaced contempt for lesser peoples, to nourish the management of perpetual downward mobility and, at the same time, reassert implausible claim to the resources to which they still imagine Providence has assured them superior rights. ♦

Jeremy Seabrook is a freelance journalist based in the UK.

Revolution on the brink

Although the Egyptian people have managed to topple the regime of Hosni Mubarak, remnants of the old order in Egypt continue to exert a decisive influence through their control of key institutions. *Ayman El-Amir* contends that no real change is possible until such influence is rooted out.

NEVER since the downfall of ousted president Hosni Mubarak has Egypt been so close to the brink of chaos. After one year, the revolution of 25 January 2011 seems shaky and confused. Despite the election of a parliament, the change of three governments and the marathon trial of Mubarak and his top aides, the old regime remains intact. Its ability to disrupt progress towards democracy, of which very little has been achieved, was clearly demonstrated on several occasions. Most recently the football game in Port Said between Al-Masri team, the host, and Al-Ahli was another example. At the end of the game, an inexplicable clash erupted. When the dust settled, 74 people were dead and several hundred injured. This time, the cronies of the Mubarak regime overplayed their hand.

In the aftermath of the Port Said bloody clashes confrontation reignited between a motley crowd of protesters and security forces who were barricaded inside the interior ministry, resulting in more casualties. This was yet another in a series of episodes of street warfare between protesters and security forces who has been a recurring phenomenon since the start of the revolution. Each side saw the other as the enemy that has to be beaten back.

It is a fulfilment of the forewarning of *Après moi le deluge* that Mubarak, in the vein of Louis XV, sounded in order to cultivate fear and foreboding as the only way to take revenge on the revolution that toppled him. In his first response to the revolution, Mubarak told Egyptians in a televised nationwide speech in February 2011 he was concerned that the protest movement that sought his ouster could lead to chaos. More than being the premonition of a concerned leader, the statement reflected a pre-



A protest against the ruling military council at Tahrir Square in Cairo in January. One year after the revolution of 25 January 2011, 'the old regime remains intact'.

meditated plan that was soon picked up by his loyalists. They realised that they could not roll back the revolution but they could create pandemonium that would wreck state institutions, make the country unruly and thwart the objectives of the uprising.

It is no coincidence that in this volatile environment security was poorly organised in the Port Said game, leaving wide gaps and failing to provide protection for the two competing teams and the 13,000 fans who attended. No one knows how the clashes started and how the weapons that were used, including knives, fireworks and guns, were smuggled in. However, early indications from the fact-finding mission of the People's Assembly strongly suggest that the whole event was pre-planned and that elements of the Port Said government and security command either collaborated or were grossly derelict.

The protests and clashes that followed at the interior ministry in Cairo were less serious in the number of

casualties but had more grave implications. Protests against the shady involvement of high-ranking elements of the ministry and its affiliated state security apparatus are developing into a confrontation between sections of the people and state institutions. Not only are the free-wheeling agents of the toppled Mubarak regime still active, but also their scheme to undermine state institutions and spread chaos is working.

People do not trust state institutions anymore, especially the interior ministry and the ruling military council, because of their perceived foot-dragging in matters of urgent national interest. Slow court action on criminal offences committed by Mubarak, his sons, top aides and his business coterie is a case in point. Cases of rampant corruption, the strong suspicion people have that the principal Tora Prison inmates are still directing certain subversive activities, money laundering and the illegal smuggling of funds, the planting of

thugs to disrupt peaceful demonstrations and turn protesters against each other, and the fact that Suzanne Thabet, wife of the discredited former dictator, is free and blameless and her protégés at the Alexandria Library and other institutions remain untouched and unaccountable, fuel the outrage of the nation. Many believe that justice delayed is justice denied. Few of the Mubarak conspirators are on trial, more will face trial in the years to come, convictions will lead to appeals and appeals will end up in the Court of Cassation which may or may not order retrials, going back to square one. This is why people are frustrated and are losing faith in state institutions. It is an effective weapon of the counter-revolution – frustration will set people against the state. This is the recipe for the civil war that decimated Somalia for over 20 years and tormented Lebanon for 15 years. Both were precipitated by the breakdown of state organs that led to mass chaos.

That was what Mubarak contemplated when he warned in his speech before he stepped down that the downfall of his regime would lead to anarchy. During his 30 years in power he worked to ensure that his regime was so intertwined with the state that they became inseparable. The Mubarak regime became the state of Egypt and he controlled both and all the institutions deriving from them. He presided over the National Democratic Party (NDP) that fraudulently filled the majority of seats in the legislature and that directed the executive branch. He commanded the military and the police, managed appointments to the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and manipulated the business community through government contracts and the distribution of land.

After the downfall of Mubarak on 11 February 2011, Egyptians erupted in jubilation as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces took charge of safeguarding state institutions. It was a wobbly transitional period characterised by misjudgement and hesitation, inadvertently feeding into the state of chaos that the Mubarak regime wanted to craft. The council was more reactive than proactive to the re-



Protesters confronting security forces near the interior ministry in Cairo. 'People do not trust state institutions anymore, especially the interior ministry and the ruling military council, because of their perceived foot-dragging in matters of urgent national interest.'

quirements of the transitional period and to the order of priorities. Tahrir Square set the priorities and the council together with its appointed governments provided half-measures. That was when the masses of Egyptians began to lose faith in the council and its governments. For example, despite persistent rumours and some evidence that the Tora Prison super-inmates were micro-managing the counter-revolution, only after the Port Said massacre did the military council move to disperse those inmates to different prisons. The case of Suzanne Thabet and her appointed robber-courtiers has yet to be investigated.

It is the obligation of those now in power to wipe the Mubarak slate clean.

There is clear evidence that Mubarak and NDP thugs have been behind many acts of violence. Those are believed to be moved by some officers of the interior ministry, which a year into the 25 January Revolution is yet to be purged and restructured. It is mind-boggling that three succes-

sive governments have failed to do this job. It would seem that the revolutionary mentality has failed to penetrate the stultified mechanisms of government. Consequently, it is a fair assumption that the Mubarak regime still manages state affairs by remote control.

Egyptians continue to pay dearly for daring to oust Mubarak and his regime. They see too many promises and too few rewards for their revolution. They are outraged that the revolution they waged, and for which they suffered so many casualties, has been stolen by people who claim they are the prophets of democracy and progress. In the parliamentary elections, Egyptians voted for the loudest voice, the biggest banner and the most pious slogan, for anyone who promised to deliver them from decades of poverty, illness and hunger under the Mubarak autocracy. Mubarak and company are desperately trying to deny the people they oppressed these simple aspirations. It is the obligation of those now in power to wipe the Mubarak slate clean, with no apology or obligation to the old regime. ♦

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The need to retool Liberia's relationship with the US

The disclosure by a US newspaper that former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who now faces charges of crimes against humanity in a UN-backed tribunal, was a CIA informant has come as a shock to all those who have set much store on Liberia's historical relationship with the US. After so many betrayals, it is time for a rethink of this relationship, says *Robtel Neajai Pailey*.

This op-ed was written based on a front-page Boston Globe article on 17 January, which asserted that Charles Taylor was a CIA informant. However, the Globe on 25 January retracted its statement through an editor's note that said the CIA refused to release 48 documents to the Globe pertaining to Charles Taylor's alleged relationship with American intelligence. The author's position about Liberia retooling its relationship with the United States remains the same.

TWO very significant and interconnected events happened in Liberia in the week of 16 January – President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was inaugurated for a second term with a subdued opposition attending the ceremonies, and former President Charles Taylor was implicated in a *Boston Globe* article for serving as a CIA informant beginning in the early 1980s and spanning many decades.

Taylor, Taylor, how did your garden grow?

Taylor, who currently languishes in a jail cell in The Hague after undergoing trial for 11 counts of crimes against humanity in the Sierra Leonean civil war, has ironically never faced trial for the atrocities that he orchestrated, oversaw, and implemented in Liberia. The bombshell news that he was indeed a CIA informant in the early years of his rise to notoriety calls into question America's complicity in Taylor's destruction of Liberia.

America's facilitation of Taylor's escape from a maximum-security



Charles Taylor.

prison in Boston in 1985 – while he was facing extradition to Liberia for allegedly stealing \$1 million from the General Services Agency, which he headed during President Samuel Kanyon Doe's regime – was always rumoured but never corroborated. I remember covering the first day of Taylor's trial in The Hague for *Pambazuka News*, and interviewing Stephen Rapp, the then chief prosecutor, about whether or not his investigations into Taylor's exploits in Libya and Sierra Leone ever unearthed the real causes of his 'escape' from the maximum-security prison in Massachusetts. Rapp was tight-lipped, yet appeared confounded by this mystery as well. When Taylor eventually confessed during the Hague trial that he strolled out of prison after a guard conveniently opened his cell one night, we all knew that something was awry: 'I am calling it my release because I didn't break out,' Taylor testified. 'I did not pay any money. I did

not know the guys who picked me up. I was not hiding [afterwards].'

The Taylor-CIA connection has re-inscribed for Liberians an age-old dilemma, what to do with our so-called historical relationship with the United States, which has been fraught with betrayal after betrayal. Liberians who have been commenting on various notice boards are justifiably angry, upset and disappointed, but not surprised. This is the validation we've been wanting for years, and it comes on the heels of the inauguration for a second term of our head of state, who was ironically pictured dedicating the new US Embassy in Liberia in the same week, with a smiling US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the foreground.

Some Liberians, under anonymity, are arguing that US authorities who courted Taylor for intelligence should be brought to justice for crimes against humanity in the Liberian civil war, that the International Criminal Court – now headed by a female Gambian national – should exhibit blind justice, that instead of hauling African and non-Western leaders to the international body for prosecution, they too should face the full weight of the law. I tend to agree with these arguments, however radical and far-fetched they may seem.

Inquiring Liberian minds deserve to know

The *Globe* article recounts that the CIA has said releasing further information could be a national security threat. A threat to whom, might I ask? Liberians deserve to know the

nature, duration, scale, and scope of the CIA-Taylor relationship; it is a part of our national history, and must be recounted in the history books for our children and our children's children to remember that a relationship with the US must be monitored at all times.

Liberians are not gullible, nor are we unsophisticated in realising that one plus one equals two. We've always known that the dubiousness surrounding Taylor's escape from the Massachusetts maximum-security prison was the beginning of the end for us. And if the implications of the *Globe* article are true, then the CIA could provide more answers.

It's no wonder that the US didn't intervene in the Liberian civil war, though Liberians begged and pleaded for its 'father/mother' to stop us from killing each other. One US diplomat at the time even said that 'Liberia is of no strategic interest to the United States'. It begs the question, if Liberia was of 'no strategic interest' during the war, when we were killing ourselves and each other in the name of liberation, what is Liberia's strategic interest to the US now, when US NGOs and development workers abound, and the Peace Corps has reinserted itself?

This should send a strong signal to Liberians and Liberia once and for all that America cannot be trusted. From Noriega, to Osama, to Saddam, to Samuel Doe, authoritarian leaders who end up in the US's good graces are never there for long.

Limits of reciprocity

What Liberians and the Liberian government should be doing is strategising, devising our own 'Liberia Policy for the US' which factors in seriously our chequered history with unsentimental bias.

We should also rely on a corpus of intellectual and creative work that has already investigated our 'limits of reciprocity' with the United States. Liberian filmmaker Nancee Oku Bright's film, *Liberia: America's Step-*



Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf accompanying US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during the latter's trip to Liberia in January. Liberia's historical relationship with the US 'has been fraught with betrayal after betrayal.'



Soldiers from Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) during the Liberian civil war. Taylor has never faced trial for the atrocities he orchestrated, oversaw and implemented in that war.

child, explores the torturous relationship between Liberia and the United States, with her thesis being that the US sees Liberia as an 'outside' child, one who is illegitimate upon conception and can be used and abused at will without consequence. And Libe-

rian academic Dr D Elwood Dunn also interrogates this relationship in his book, *Liberia and the United States During the Cold War: Limits of Reciprocity*, showing that the Cold War placed Liberia in a very strategic position to exploit its relationship with the United States, yet with unintended consequences.

In this new political dispensation, it should be clear that Liberia should hold the US at arm's length, that hosting AFRICOM or any US satellite post is out of the question, that we have to use them just as strategically as they have used us. With the geopolitics of China and other emerging nations, Liberia needs to develop a 'Look South Policy', not because we have become alienated, as in the case of Zimbabwe, but because we have made a conscious decision to explore other options, remembering that the US will act only in its interest and leave those caught in the crossfire to fend for themselves.

We deserve to know the details of Taylor's relationship with the CIA. It is crucial to our development planning, historical remembrance, healing and nation-building. ♦

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The .0000063% election

While the power of money in US electoral politics is well known, some recent developments have laid bare its increasingly dominant role. *Ari Berman* explains how the politics of the super rich have now become American politics.

AT a time when it's become a cliché to say that Occupy Wall Street has changed the nation's political conversation – drawing long overdue attention to the struggles of the 99% – electoral politics and the 2012 presidential election have become almost exclusively defined by the 1%. Or, to be more precise, the .0000063%. Those are the 196 individual donors who have provided nearly 80% of the money raised by super PACs in 2011 by giving \$100,000 or more each.

These political action committees, spawned by the Supreme Court's 5-4 *Citizens United* decision in January 2010, can raise unlimited amounts of money from individuals, corporations, or unions for the purpose of supporting or opposing a political candidate. In theory, super PACs are legally prohibited from coordinating directly with a candidate, though in practice they're just a murkier extension of political campaigns, performing all the functions of a traditional campaign without any of the corresponding accountability.

If 2008 was the year of the small donor, when many political pundits (myself included) predicted that the fusion of grassroots organising and cyber-activism would transform how campaigns were run, then 2012 is 'the year of the big donor', when a candidate is only as good as the amount of money in his super PAC. 'In this campaign, every candidate needs his own billionaires,' wrote Jane Mayer of *The New Yorker*.

'This really is the selling of America,' claims former presidential candidate and Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean. 'We've been sold out by five justices thanks to the *Citizens United* decision.'

In truth, our democracy was sold to the highest bidder long ago, but in the 2012 election the explosion of super PACs has shifted the public's



Republican Party presidential candidate Mitt Romney on the campaign trail. Romney's super PAC has raised \$30 million, 98% from donors who gave \$25,000 or more.

focus to the staggering inequality in our political system, just as the Occupy movement shined a light on the gross inequity of the economy. The two, of course, go hand in hand.

'We're going to beat money power with people power,' Newt Gingrich said after losing to Mitt Romney in Florida as January ended. The walking embodiment of the lobbying-industrial complex, Gingrich made that statement even though his candidacy is being propped up by a super PAC funded by two \$5 million donations from Las Vegas casino magnate Sheldon Adelson. It might have been more amusing if the GOP presidential primary weren't a case study of a contest long on money and short on participation.

The Wesleyan Media Project recently reported a 1600% increase in interest-group-sponsored TV ads in this cycle as compared to the 2008 primaries. Florida has proven the battle royal of the super PACs thus far. There, the pro-Romney super PAC, Restore Our Future, outspent the pro-Gingrich super PAC, Winning Our Future, five to one. In the last week of the campaign alone, Romney and his allies ran 13,000 TV ads in

Florida, compared to only 200 for Gingrich. Ninety-two percent of the ads were negative in nature, with two-thirds attacking Gingrich, who, ironically enough, had been a fervent advocate of the *Citizens United* decision.

With the exception of Ron Paul's underdog candidacy and Rick Santorum's upset victory in Iowa – where he spent almost no money but visited all of the state's 99 counties – the Republican candidates and their allied super PACs have all but abandoned retail campaigning and grassroots politicking. They have chosen instead to spend their war chests on TV.

The results can already be seen in the first primaries and caucuses: an onslaught of money and a demobilised electorate. It's undoubtedly no coincidence that, when compared with 2008, turnout was down 25% in Florida, and that, this time around, fewer Republicans have shown up in every state that's voted so far, except for South Carolina. According to political scientists Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, negative TV ads contribute to 'a political implosion of apathy and withdrawal'. *New York Times* columnist Tim Egan has la-

belled the post-*Citizens United* era 'your democracy on meth'.

The .01% primary

More than 300 super PACs are now registered with the Federal Election Commission. The one financed by the greatest number of small donors belongs to Stephen Colbert, who's turned his TV show into a brilliant commentary on the deformed super PAC landscape. Colbert's satirical super PAC, Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow, has raised \$1 million from 31,595 people, including 1,600 people who gave \$1 each. Consider this a rare show of people power in 2012.

Otherwise the super PACs on both sides of the aisle are financed by the 1% of the 1%. Romney's Restore Our Future super PAC, founded by the general counsel of his 2008 campaign, has led the herd, raising \$30 million, 98% from donors who gave \$25,000 or more. Ten million dollars came from just 10 donors who gave \$1 million each. These included three hedge-fund managers and Houston Republican Bob Perry, the main funder behind the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth in 2004, whose scurrilous ads did such an effective job of destroying John Kerry's electoral prospects. Sixty-five percent of the funds that poured into Romney's super PAC in the second half of 2011 came from the finance, insurance and real estate sector, otherwise known as the people who brought you the economic meltdown of 2007-08.

Romney's campaign has raised twice as much as his super PAC, which is more than you can say for Rick Santorum, whose super PAC – Red, White & Blue – has raised and spent more than the candidate himself. Forty percent of the \$2 million that has so far gone into Red, White & Blue came from just one man, Foster Friess, a conservative hedge-fund billionaire and Christian evangelical from Wyoming.

In the wake of Santorum's upset victories in Colorado, Minnesota, and Missouri on 7 February, Friess told the *New York Times* that he'd recruited

\$1 million for Santorum's super PAC from another (unnamed) donor and upped his own giving, though he wouldn't say by how much. We won't find out until the next campaign disclosure filing in three months, by which time the GOP primary will almost certainly be decided.

For now, Gingrich's sugar daddy Adelson has pledged to stay with his flagging campaign, but he's also signalled that if the former Speaker of the House goes down, he'll be ready to donate even more super PAC money to a Romney presidential bid. And keep in mind that there's nothing in the post-*Citizens United* law to stop a donor like Adelson, hell-bent on preventing the Obama administration from standing in the way of an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, from giving \$100 million or, for that matter, however much he likes.

Before *Citizens United*, the maximum amount one person could give to a candidate was \$2,500; for a political action committee, \$5,000; for a political party committee, \$30,800. Now, the sky's the limit for a super PAC, and even more disturbingly, any donor can give an unlimited contribution to a 501c4 – outfits defined by the Internal Revenue Service as 'civic leagues or organisations not organised for profit but operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare' – and to make matters worse, that contribution will remain eternally secret. In this way, American politics is descending further into the darkness, with 501c4s quickly gaining influence as 'shadow super PACs'.

A recent analysis by the *Washington Post* found that, at a cost of \$24 million, 40% of the TV ads in the presidential race so far came from these tax-exempt 'social welfare' groups. The Karl Rove-founded American Crossroads, a leading conservative super PAC attacking Democratic candidates and the Obama administration, also runs a 501c4 called Crossroads GPS. It's raised twice as much money as its sister group, all from donations whose sources will remain hidden from American voters.

Serving as a secret slush fund for billionaires evidently now qualifies as social welfare.

The Income Defence Industry

In his book *Oligarchy*, political scientist Jeffrey Winters refers to the disproportionately wealthy and influential actors in the political system as the 'Income Defence Industry'. If you want to know how the moneyed class, who prospered during the Bush and Clinton years, found a way to kill or water down nearly everything it objected to in the Obama years, look no further than the grip of the 1% of the 1% on our political system.

This simple fact explains why hedge-fund managers pay a lower tax rate than their secretaries, or why the US is the only industrialised nation without a single-payer universal healthcare system, or why the planet continues to warm at an unprecedented pace while we do nothing to combat global warming. Money usually buys elections and, whoever is elected, it almost always buys influence.

In the 2010 election, the 1% of the 1% accounted for 25% of all campaign-related donations, totalling \$774 million, and 80% of all donations to the Democratic and Republican parties, the highest percentage since 1990. In congressional races in 2010, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, the candidate who spent the most money won 85% of House races and 83% of Senate races.

The media loves an underdog story, but nowadays the underdog is ever less likely to win. Given the cost of running campaigns and the overwhelming premium on outspending your opponent, it's no surprise that nearly half the members of Congress are millionaires, and the median net worth of a US Senator is \$2.56 million.

The influence of super PACs was already evident by November 2010, just nine months after the Supreme Court's ruling. John Nichols and Robert McChesney of *The Nation* note that, of the 53 competitive House districts where Rove's Crossroads or-

organisation outspent Democratic candidates in 2010, Republicans won 51. As it turned out, however, the last election was a mere test run for the monetary extravaganza that is 2012.

Republicans are banking on that super PAC advantage again this year, when the costs of the presidential contest and all other races for federal posts will soar from \$5 billion in 2008 to as high as \$7 billion by November. (The 2000 election cost a 'mere' \$3 billion.) In other words, the amount spent this election season will be roughly the equivalent of the gross domestic product of Haiti.

The myth of small donors

In June 2003, presidential candidate Howard Dean shocked the political establishment by raising \$828,000 in one day over the Internet, with an average donation of \$112. Dean, in fact, got 38% of his campaign's total funds from donations of \$200 or less, planting the seeds for what many forecast would be a small-donor revolution in American politics.

Four years later, Barack Obama raised a third of his record-breaking \$745 million campaign haul from small donors, while Ron Paul raised 39% from small donors on the Republican side. Much of Paul's campaign was financed by online 'money bombs', when enthusiastic supporters generated millions of dollars in brief, coordinated bursts. The amount of money raised in small donations by Obama, in particular, raised hopes that his campaign had found a way to break the death grip of big donors on American politics.

In retrospect, the small-donor utopianism surrounding Obama seems naïve. Despite all the adulatory media attention about his small donors, the candidate still raised the bulk of his money from big givers. (Typically, these days, incumbent members of Congress raise less than 10% of their campaign funds from small donors, with those numbers actually dropping when you reach the gubernatorial and state legislative levels.) Obama's top contributors included employees of Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, and Citigroup, hardly standard bear-

ers for the little guy. For obvious reasons, the campaign chose to emphasise the small donors over the big ones in its narrative, as it continues to do in 2012.

Interestingly enough, both Obama and Paul actually raised more money from small donors in 2011 than they did in 2008, 48% and 52% of their totals, respectively. But in the super PAC era that money no longer has the same impact. Even Dean doubts that his anti-establishment, Internet-fuelled campaign from 2004 would be as successful today. 'Super PACs have made a grassroots campaign less effective,' he says. 'You can still run a grassroots campaign but the problem is you can be overwhelmed now on television and by dirty mailers being sent out... It's a very big change from 2008.'

Obama is a candidate with a split personality, which makes his campaign equally schizophrenic. The Obama campaign claims it's raising 98% of its money from small donors and is 'building the biggest grassroots campaign in American history', according to campaign manager Jim Messina. But the starry-eyed statistics and the rhetoric that accompanies it are deeply misleading. Of the \$89 million raised in 2011 by the Obama Joint Victory Fund, a collaboration of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the Obama campaign, 74% came from donations of \$20,000 or more and 99% from donations of \$1,000 or more.

The campaign has 445 'bundlers' (dubbed 'volunteer fundraisers' by the campaign), who gather money from their wealthy friends and package it for Obama. They have raised at least \$74.4 million for Obama and the DNC in 2011. Sixty-one of those bundlers raised \$500,000 or more. Obama held 73 fundraisers in 2011 and 13 in January alone, where the price of admission was almost always \$35,800 a head.

An increase in small-donor contributions and a surge of big-money fundraisers still wasn't enough, however, to give Obama an advantage over Republicans in the money chase. That's why the Obama campaign, until recently adamantly against super PACs, suddenly relented and sig-

nalled its support for a pro-Obama super PAC called Priorities USA.

A day after the announcement that the campaign, like its Republican rivals, would super PAC it up, Messina spoke at the members-only Core Club in Manhattan and 'assured a group of Democratic donors from the financial services industry that Obama won't demonise Wall Street as he stresses populist appeals in his re-election campaign', reported *Bloomberg Businessweek*. 'Messina told the group of Wall Street donors that the president plans to run against Romney, not the industry that made the former governor of Massachusetts millions.'

In other words, don't expect a convincing return to the theme of the people versus the powerful in campaign 2012, even though Romney, if the nominee, would be particularly vulnerable to that line of attack. After all, so far his campaign has raised only 9% of its campaign contributions from small donors, well behind both Senator John McCain, 21% in 2008, and George W Bush, 26% in 2004.

In the fourth quarter of 2011, Romney outraised Obama among the top firms on Wall Street by a margin of 11 to 1. His top three campaign contributions are from employees of Goldman Sachs (\$496,430), JPMorgan (\$317,400) and Morgan Stanley (\$277,850). The banks have fallen out of favour with the public, but their campaign cash is indispensable among the political class and so they remain as powerful as ever in American politics.

In a recent segment of his show, Stephen Colbert noted that half of the money (\$67 million) raised by super PACs in 2011 had come from just 22 people. 'That's 7 one-millionths of 1%', or roughly .000000071%, Colbert said while spraying a fire extinguisher on his fuming calculator. 'So Occupy Wall Street, you're going to want to change those signs.'

Ari Berman is a contributing writer for the Nation magazine and an Investigative Journalism Fellow at The Nation Institute. His book, Herding Donkeys: The Fight to Rebuild the Democratic Party and Reshape American Politics (Picador) is now out in paperback with a new afterword. Follow him on Twitter @AriBerman. This article is reproduced from TomDispatch.com.

Heroes behind the lines

The welcome release of political prisoners in Burma (Myanmar) should also be an occasion to acknowledge the stoicism and heroism of their families during their long years of incarceration, says *Kyaw Zwa Moe*.

IN 1969, when Thandar was only three years old, she slept on the floor of a Rangoon-to-Mandalay train with her mother lying beside her. Seats were an unaffordable luxury, but neither Thandar nor her mother minded the uncomfortable 12-hour journey. They were travelling to visit her father, whom she had not seen since she was six months old, in Mandalay Prison.

The trip marked the first of hundreds of prison visits that Thandar would make in her lifetime, but Lady Luck – who often goes AWOL in Burma – did not smile on her on this occasion. Upon arrival at Mandalay Prison, Thandar and her mother discovered that her father, a journalist and peace activist who was arrested by Gen Ne Win's regime in 1966, had been sent to the prison on Great Coco Island in the Indian Ocean, also known as Devil's Island, which had no inhabitants other than prisoners and their guards.

Three decades later, Thandar once again found herself on the floor of a train from Rangoon to Mandalay. Life had come full circle, and this time she was the mother escorting a young child to see a father behind bars. Her five-year-old son lay next to her, and they were travelling to meet her husband, Nay Oo, a member of the National League for Democracy (NLD) who was serving a 14-year sentence in the remote Kalay Prison for his role in Burma's pro-democracy movement.

After travelling the 400 miles from Rangoon to Mandalay on the floor of the train, Thandar and her son had to continue by bus for another 160 miles through dense jungle to Kalay. Along the way, they had to cross the wild Chindwin River by boat, and as



Thandar: 'I feel I was born to make trips to prisons.'

the craft was being tossed about by monsoon season waves, a tearful Thandar wondered whether she would survive the 4-day journey.

But she wiped away her tears, gritted her teeth and endured, finally arriving at Kalay Prison for the 15-minute visitation period she would be allotted with her husband.

'You deserve an award,' the warden said mockingly upon her arrival. 'Your husband was among the first batch of new prisoners, and you're the first person to visit.'

'No thanks, I don't need that award,' Thandar replied, unable to resist the retort despite knowing that it might bring trouble for her and her husband. Exhaustion and anger had consumed her.

After seeing Nay Oo incarcerated in deplorable conditions, Thandar decided to stay in Kalay so she could visit and bring him nutritional food every fortnight. But she had no money left after paying the travel expenses, so she decided to sell fish paste in the Kalay town market. A 5,000 kyat donation from NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and another 5,000 kyat from a sympathetic poet, helped her get

started.

'I feel I was born to make trips to prisons,' Thandar says, recalling the past from her current home in a refugee camp in Thailand. 'I started with my father and continued with my husband.'

Severe hardships

Like the trips to the prisons, Thandar says, her journey from being a prisoner's daughter to a prisoner's wife was long and arduous.

As a young girl, Thandar was unable to understand that her father's imprisonment was unjust, that he was not a criminal. So when other kids teased her about being a 'prisoner's daughter', she was often reduced to tears and left hiding from her friends.

Thandar's father was eventually released, but when she turned 12 he was arrested for a second time. As a result, she had to quit school and work every day dyeing sarongs so her family could make ends meet and afford trips to the prison.

Her hardships became even more severe as a prisoner's wife.

'It's incomparably more difficult to be the wife of a prisoner than the daughter,' she says. 'I was faced with more economic and social problems. In my neighbourhood, a wife without a husband was unprotected – she was viewed as having less integrity and was vulnerable to any insult.'

Some relatives wouldn't even let her visit their home, because they were afraid that government authorities would put pressure on them if they were seen as having political connections.

'It made my life really miserable,' Thandar says.

But she is considerably grateful

to many people in Kalay Town, who bought fish paste from her because they knew her husband was a political prisoner and she was working to support him.

‘They named my smelly commodity “democracy fish paste”,’ she says with a smile. ‘Without their moral and economic support, I wouldn’t have been able to regularly help my husband.’

Between 1998 and 2005, the eight years during which Nay Oo was jailed, Thandar made more than 200 visits to Kalay Prison. During that time, she came in contact with the family members of many other political prisoners, and tried to help some of those in even more dire straits than her.

Since the time that Thandar’s father was imprisoned, there has never been any shortage of political prisoners in Burma, and there are currently over 2,000 political prisoners incarcerated in 44 prisons across the country.

Due to the horrible prison conditions, the inmates rely on food, medicine and necessities supplied by visiting family members, and in addition to visiting her husband regularly, Thandar helped family members of other political prisoners make trips to remote prisons.

One family she assisted was that of a school teacher named Saw Ni Aung, who in 1991 was arrested along with his wife in connection with an ethnic Karen uprising in their home town of Bogalay. When Saw Ni Aung was sentenced to life imprisonment and his wife to five years, they left a five-year-old and a six-month-old son behind.

At first, Saw Ni Aung was held in Kalay Prison alongside Nay Oo. He passed the time there making small soap sculptures of horses and elephants for his two sons, which he would pass to Nay Oo, who gave them to Thandar, who delivered them to Saw Ni Aung’s sons. Although the sculptures may seem like a small gesture, Thandar says, they represented and transmitted Saw Ni Aung’s *metta* (loving kindness) for his sons.

Later, when Saw Ni Aung was transferred to another remote prison in Shan State, Thandar accompanied

his eldest son on the long journey so that father and son could see each other for the first time in 10 years.

At first, however, the prison authorities would not allow Thandar and the boy to see Saw Ni Aung – military intelligence officers interrogated Thandar and questioned why she was helping the young boy, even asking if he was really Saw Ni Aung’s son. But finally, after the boy explained that he had not seen his father in a decade and provided an hour’s worth of details about his family, the officers were convinced and let him and Thandar see Saw Ni Aung.

‘It was a sad meeting. When I heard them call each other “father” and “son”, it made me tremble,’ Thandar recalls. ‘Saw Ni Aung was looking at the face of his teenage son who he last held as a baby. I couldn’t hold back my tears.’

More tears flowed, this time from the eyes of Saw Ni Aung, when the prisoner asked about his wife.

‘Mother died,’ his son muttered, and then explained that his mother had passed away soon after being released from prison.

Before parting, Saw Ni Aung presented his son with a pair of football shoes that he had knitted out of wool cotton in his cell.

‘I know you like playing football,’ Saw Ni Aung said. ‘It’s a kind of art, just try your best. That’s all I can do from here, my son.’

Stories

In 1999, Thandar transformed the hardship of her prison visits into success by writing stories based on her experiences under the pen name Hnin Pan Eain. That year, one of her stories received an award in a literary competition held by the NLD, and three more awards followed – one of them for an anthology of short stories published in Burma in 2007.

Then in late 2008, Thandar, her husband Nay Oo and their son fled Burma and found shelter in the refugee camp in Thailand, where she continues to live and write. Her stories are broadcast on a weekly basis by the Washington DC-based Radio Free

Asia, where millions of people in Burma listen to her voice. In March 2011, she published a book in the Burmese language called *Heroes’ Kingdom in Darkness*, a compilation of her stories about 40 prisoners and their families.

With her husband now free, Thandar does not need to visit prisons anymore. But her family’s unwanted legacy has been passed on to her niece, Pan Wah, whose fiancé Khin Maung Win was arrested just a couple of months after they became engaged in 2008.

Khin Maung Win was sentenced to 12 years in prison and sent to a cell for the same reason that Thandar’s father and husband were imprisoned – voicing political views that are in opposition to the oppressive generals and ex-generals who control Burma. Just before being shipped away, he married Pan Wah in a court ceremony. This was both a romantic and a practical decision, because as his wife, Pan Wah is able to visit him in prison just as Thandar had done for Nay Oo.

‘Don’t worry, I will always come to see you,’ Pan Wah told Khin Maung Win just before he was handcuffed and loaded into a police vehicle which was waiting to take him away for 12 years.

Thandar says that she thinks of family visits as a kind of physical and mental nutrition for the political prisoners, who she sees as freedom fighters on the frontline, fighting for democracy and human rights on behalf of the people.

‘They are “warriors” but have no weapons,’ she says. ‘Our visits are a source of strength for them.’

Nay Oo, the husband she supported for so many years, agrees.

‘For a battle, soldiers alone can’t defeat the enemy. They need a supporting line with ammunition, food and medicine,’ he says. ‘The support of my wife and anyone else is invaluable – even a 15-minute fortnightly meeting means a lot. Without them, we can’t be steadfast on our rough road. They are the heroes behind the lines, but are rarely recognised.’ ♦

This article is reproduced from The Irrawaddy (September 2011, www.irrawaddy.org).

Honduras: A Washington-abetted catastrophe

The deaths of some 360 prisoners in the world's worst prison fire have briefly turned the world's spotlight on the situation in Honduras under the dictatorial rule of President Porfirio Lobo. The fire in an overcrowded prison is however only one manifestation of the continuing human rights violations that have characterised the rule of this US-backed regime. *Mark Engler* explains why Honduras is a human rights catastrophe.

HONDURAS has become a human rights disaster. The country now has the world's highest murder rate. And impunity for political violence is the norm.

For all this, the United States deserves a good deal of the blame.

I was pleased to see the *New York Times* recently publish a hard-hitting op-ed by Dana Frank that makes this case. Lest anyone think that things in Honduras have settled into a peaceable, post-coup normality, Frank describes the post-June 2009 'chain of events' – a coup that the United States didn't stop, a fraudulent election that it accepted – [that] has now allowed corruption to mushroom. The judicial system hardly functions. Impunity reigns. At least 34 members of the opposition have disappeared or been killed, and more than 300 people have been killed by state security forces since the coup, according to the leading human rights organisation Cofadeh. At least 13 journalists have been killed since [President Porfirio] Lobo took office, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

'The police in Tegucigalpa, the capital, are believed to have killed the son of Julieta Castellanos, the rector of the country's biggest university, along with a friend of his, on 22 October 2011. Top police officials quickly admitted their suspects were police officers, but failed to immediately detain them. When prominent figures came forward to charge that the police are riddled with death squads and drug traffickers, the most famous accuser was a former police commissioner, Alfredo Landaverde. He was assassinated on 7 December.

Only now has the government begun to make significant arrests of police officers.

'State-sponsored repression continues. According to Cofadeh, at least 43 campesino [peasant] activists participating in land struggles in the Aguán Valley have been killed in the past two and a half years at the hands of the police, the military and the private security army of Miguel Facussé. Mr Facussé is mentioned in United States Embassy cables made public by WikiLeaks as the richest man in the country, a big supporter of the post-coup regime and owner of land used to transfer cocaine.'

Response

On 7 February, a comical response to Frank's piece appeared in *foreignpolicy.com*, written by former Bush administration official José Cárdenas. It was humorous in that it included an understated disclaimer at the end. Cárdenas wrote, 'Full disclosure: In July 2009, I helped to advise a Honduran business delegation that came to Washington during their presidential crisis to defend Manuel Zelaya's removal from power.'

Not surprisingly, given his qualifications, Cárdenas frames Hondu-



The Honduran police. '[M]ore than 300 people [in Honduras] have been killed by state security forces since the coup' in June 2009.

ras's current problems as solely the product of drug trafficking, and he encourages the United States to recognise that 'Honduras's war on drugs is ours too'.

Frank did a good job preemptively responding to this notion. She wrote, 'Much of the press in the United States has attributed this violence solely to drug trafficking and gangs. But the coup was what threw open the doors to a huge increase in drug trafficking and violence, and it unleashed a continuing wave of state-sponsored repression.'

Backing up Frank's point, Human Rights Watch notes in its *World Report 2012: Honduras* that the country 'failed in 2011 to hold accountable those responsible for human rights violations under the de facto government that took power after the 2009 military coup....Violence and threats against journalists, human

rights defenders, political activists, and transgender people continued. Those responsible for these abuses are rarely held to account.'

Whether or not you recognise political violence as part of the problem (Cárdenas neglects to mention it) goes far in determining your view of appropriate policy remedies. Cárdenas recommends working closely with the Honduran government and supporting its military with continued aid. Frank, in contrast, quotes the rector whose son was murdered: 'Stop feeding the beast,' Julieta Castellanos says. 'She, like other human rights advocates, insists that the Lobo government cannot reform itself,' Frank adds.

Cárdenas complains that Lobo is not a strong enough anti-drug leader. Yet, in a final sad statement, he reveals that his model of an appropriately serious drug warrior is Colombia's former president Álvaro Uribe. Of course, Colombia is an excellent case of a country in which political violence and the drug trade have long gone hand in hand. On that topic, Human Rights Watch's Daniel Wilkinson, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, offers a recommended read on the not-pretty connections between Uribe and narco-trafficking paramilitaries. Armed right-wing groups, Wilkinson reports, 'continue to kill trade unionists and, increasingly, leaders of displaced communities seeking to reclaim their lands. These groups no longer present themselves as a national counterinsurgency movement, but they do continue to traffic illegal drugs and terrorise civilians the way the AUC [the paramilitary group that Uribe's government ostensibly disbanded] once did. They are the legacy of Uribe's approach to "justice and peace".'

If this is the model for Honduras, the country is sure to remain a Washington-abetted human rights catastrophe for a long time to come. ♦

Mark Engler is a freelance journalist and a senior analyst with Foreign Policy In Focus, a network of foreign policy experts. He is author of *How to Rule the World: The Coming Battle Over the Global Economy*. This article first appeared on the *Arguing the World* blog on the website of Dissent magazine (dissentmagazine.org).

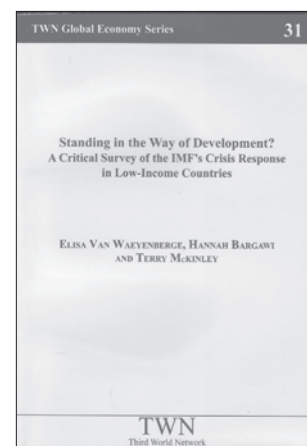
Standing in the Way of Development? A Critical Survey of the IMF's Crisis Response in Low-Income Countries

By Elisa Van Waeyenberge, Hannah Bargawi and Terry McKinley

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has been criticised for the rigid economic policy conditionalities attached to its lending programmes, says it now provides borrower states greater flexibility to adopt expansionary policies. *Standing in the Way of Development?* assesses this claim in the context of the IMF's central role in dealing with the effects of the global financial crisis in low-income countries (LICs).

This paper evaluates the general macroeconomic policy scheme promoted by the Fund and closely examines the nature of its engagement during the crisis in a representative sample of 13 LICs. The authors find that, despite some relaxation of policy restraints, the IMF essentially remains wedded to its longstanding prioritisation of price stability and low fiscal deficits over other macroeconomic goals.

Such a policy stance, it is argued, could undermine not only LICs' prospects for a quick recovery from the crisis but also their longer-term development outlook. In light of this, this paper outlines the broad contours of an alternative macroeconomic policy framework geared towards supporting long-run equitable growth and poverty reduction.



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A quiet resistance

Sokari Ekine meets women's movements in the Niger Delta and discovers that in this militarised region even small acts take courage.

THE Niger Delta has been at the centre of Nigeria's post-independence military project from the first coup in 1966 through to the present. To the outside world it remained a forgotten outpost, however, until the 1990s and the rise of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Since then, unequivocal evidence has emerged of how the region and its commerce – primarily the oil industry – has been systematically militarised, with violence by the state, multinationals and local militias deployed as an instrument of governance and intimidation to force the people into total submission.

This militarisation – and resistance to it – has taken place in the context of an ongoing series of struggles over resources. As the dispossessed indigenous communities have continued to demand corporate responsibility, environmental, economic and social justice and proper compensation, their protests have been met with murders, torture, rape, the burning of homes and property and an ever-increasing military presence. The outcome is an intensely militarised region 'secured' by an unrestrained and unaccountable tripartite force, comprising the Nigerian military, multinational oil companies and local militias.

Women in the Delta

Formal women's groups have historically been a part of the social and political organisation in the Niger Delta. Though these have tended to be based around cultural activities, they have also provided women-only spaces to organise voices of inclusion and assertion. The establishment and recognition of these organisations has helped provide a strong power base from which to challenge the multinationals.

Women's resistance in the Delta



Since the early 1990s, women in the Niger Delta have been organising protests against environmental destruction, lack of development in their communities and lack of employment by oil companies.

can be traced back to the early 1990s and the Ogoni movement MOSOP, which was led by the late Ken Saro-Wiwa. Ogoni women formed the Federation of Ogoni Women (FOWA) and were at the forefront of the demands for autonomy and control of resources in Ogoni land. FOWA was instrumental in preventing Shell from returning to Ogoni land after the judicial murder of Saro-Wiwa, who was hanged by the Nigerian state along with eight other activists in 1995. By the early 2000s, women in Rivers, Baye Isa and Delta State were organising protests and occupations against environmental destruction, lack of development in their communities and lack of employment by oil companies such as Shell, Chevron, Elf, Mobil and Agip.

In 2002, 600 women from different generations and ethnic groups – Ijaw, Itsekiri and Ilaje – came together in an alliance with young people in actions against oil firm Chevron. The women led the protest against Chevron at the company's Escravos facility near Warri. They demanded jobs for their sons and husbands, investment in the local infrastructure and a cleanup of the environmental damage caused by oil exploration. For 10

days, refusing to move, they blocked the production of oil. This was a huge achievement because the different ethnic groups had previously been in conflict with each other for many years over the meagre resources handed out by government and oil companies.

Women have often been drawn into political activity as a result of attacks by the Nigerian army's Joint Task Force (JTF) or repeated intimidation by local militias. In 2009, the Ijaw communities of Gbaramatu were invaded by the JTF using attack helicopters and tanks. Homes and farmlands were destroyed and, fearing for their lives, women ran into the mangrove swamps with their children and the elderly, where they either hid from the soldiers or attempted to make their way to the nearest city of Warri. About 2,000 women were eventually housed in a refugee camp for six months before returning home. In September 2011, hundreds of women from the Gbaramatu communities occupied the Chevron facility at Chanomi Creek, disrupting the laying of pipelines for a liquid gas project. The protests were a response to broken promises, made by both Chevron and the federal gov-



The site of an oil spill in the Niger Delta. Women in the region have, among others, been demanding a cleanup of the environmental damage caused by oil exploration.

ernment, to provide communities with water and electricity.

In Rumuekpe and Okrika women have organised to protect themselves and their livelihoods following intimidation by local militia, many of whom were found to have been paid by oil companies, including Shell. Rumuekpe is unusual in that there are four oil companies operating in the vicinity of the town, which has resulted in rivalries among the militias, traditional leaders and carpetbaggers, all vying for a share of the oil monies.

During a recent visit to the region, I spoke with women activists from Rumuekpe. The women told me how militia members paid by oil companies had terrorised the town to the point where everyone was forced to flee, abandoning their homes, property and farms to seek refuge in nearby Port Harcourt. During the period of terror, 60 people were killed.

What is left is a ghost town. On the day I visited, the women were fearful that we were being watched and it was too dangerous for me to stay for any length of time or walk through the town centre. The women made the point that in towns

and villages that did not have oil people lived in peace. This confirmed for many that it was the oil, and the oil companies, who were responsible for the violence and militarisation of their town.

The decision by the women to meet me in the abandoned town and speak out was an act of resistance and great courage. Okrika was under double occupation: on the one hand by the JTF soldiers and on the other by local armed militias. The prize is access to oil storage and processing revenues. The result is a community of mainly women, children and the elderly living in fear.

Sitting on oneself

The militarisation has been especially brutal in its impact on the lives

of women and girls, and resistance to the violence is not always obvious to an outsider. What may initially appear as passivity in these circumstances may actually be a show of strength. For example, 'sitting on oneself' – the act of a mature woman standing in quiet dignity – is a silent response to violence and intimidation that can become a very powerful act. Individual actions such as these are ways of managing suffering on a personal level by turning inwards to the self and one's family.

Much of the organising today takes place around prayer gatherings. Again, this may seem passive, but the church plays a central role in the lives of women and their communities by providing support and opportunities for collective actions that can become radicalised. This happened with the women of Liberia, who were united through the church in their fight for peace.

The success of women's protests should not be seen solely in terms of the immediate impact on multinational oil companies. We should consider the wider impacts: the politicisation of women and the bringing together of communities such as the Itsekiri and Ijaw women in Delta State, who were driven into manipulated conflicts by the actions of the state and multinationals. ♦

Sokari Ekine is a Nigerian feminist, writer and social justice activist. She blogs at Black Looks (www.blacklooks.org). This article is reproduced from Red Pepper (Issue 181, Dec/Jan 2012; see advertisement below).

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Myanmar – reflections on ‘a rich country with poor people’

As Myanmar under the new administration of President Thein Sein embraces change with the institutionalisation of political reforms, almost inevitably the issue of economic reforms will come to the fore. As the West and the international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank prepare to make their return to this long-ostracised country with their retinue of economic ‘experts’, there is a risk that Myanmar will be exposed to the same nefarious set of neoliberal policies that devastated Eastern and Central Europe after the fall of their communist regimes. *Gabriele Köhler* argues that, in lieu of these failed policies, Myanmar could take the lead in creating a ‘democratic developmental welfare state’.

AFTER decades of isolation imposed by major developed countries out of concern for the country’s human rights violations, Myanmar is emerging as a new darling of the West, judging by the accelerating succession of visits by senior officials and gurus – among them the US Secretary of State, the UK Foreign Secretary, the Development Commissioner of the European Union (EU), and high-level government officials from many countries. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are being urged to resume work there, and the EU is offering a new €150 million assistance package to accompany the country’s economic and social reforms – these are steps which had been impossible until now, due to the international sanctions policy. And new groups of investors are waiting to enter the country as soon as possible.

This sudden enthusiasm, after years of ostracising the country and depriving it of any bilateral or multi-lateral development cooperation save of a humanitarian nature, is a response to – much welcome – changes introduced by a government that came into power in 2011 in an orchestrated election process. Recent reforms include the release of political prisoners, the re-constitution of the Myanmar human rights commission, the weakening of censorship and an opening of Internet access, the adoption of a law allowing trade unions and the right to



Garment factory employees in Myanmar. Myanmar’s workers should enjoy decent work conditions and earn incomes commensurate with the country’s overall economic wealth.

strike, the suspension of an environmentally damaging hydropower project with China, peace negotiations with ethnic minority groups, and other significant steps. The dissident leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who until 2010 had been under house arrest almost continuously since she was denied the election victory she had achieved in 1990 and who accordingly had refused any interaction with the oppressive government, has adapted her political stance since mid-2011, meeting with President Thein Sein first quietly and then publicly, and in November announced that she and her party would be standing in the April 2012 by-elections.

One hopes that the about-face of Western powers is borne out of a genuine commitment to supporting

peace and democratic reforms. But one fears that in reality the change of position is driven as much or more by the sudden awareness that China in particular, but also Thailand, Singapore and India, have been ruthlessly benefiting from the abundant natural resources of Myanmar – natural gas, hydropower potential, gemstones, real estate for industrial production zones or tourism – and the country’s geostrategic position with access to the Indian Ocean, while businesses in the US and Europe were missing out on very lucrative deals and investment opportunities.

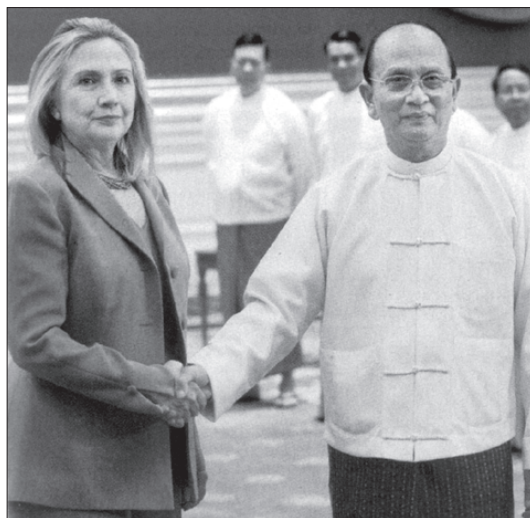
Political and economic reform are intermeshed, and past decades have shown time and again that the important movement to ensure civil liberties, democracy and most fundamen-

tally the guarantee of human rights is very often confused and conflated with measures to introduce neoliberal capitalism and prise open a country to the economic interests of individual and multinational investors. This was the case in Eastern and Central Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union; 20 years later, the populations in most of these countries are still reeling from the adverse effects of privatisation – which benefited insiders and created new oligopolies – and of deregulation – which dismantled core public services in health, education and infrastructure, cancelled crucial social transfers such as pension commitments, and in general hollowed out and destroyed government functions so vital to the delivery or regulation of public goods and to efficient and transparent public administration. These measures were sold to the then emerging democracies as the only available remedy to address statist oppression, corruption, cronyism and inefficiency – instead of reforming the state, introducing accountability, and preserving and enhancing public goods and services.

Policy space to innovate

There is a risk that Myanmar will be exposed to the same set of nefarious policy ideas, especially now that many of the welfare states in Europe have themselves embarked on a brutal course of fiscal austerity, with massive public sector cutbacks and a freezing of wages and social transfers.

However, a country as endowed with valuable resources as Myanmar has the means to use its policy space to innovate, and to create a democratic developmental welfare state. As U Myint, a leading Burmese economist and head of the country's new economic advisory board, has put it: Myanmar is a rich country with poor people. It has the fiscal resources to upgrade socio-economic policy and macroeconomic policy around objectives of social justice and economic development. It could introduce



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton meeting Myanmar President Thein Sein during her visit to the country in December. After decades of isolation, Myanmar is emerging as a new darling of the West.

proactive labour policies to create decent work in the public sector – health, education, social services, civil administration – to build infrastructure in the rural areas, deliver electricity and upgrade public transport; to finance and lead extension and innovation in the rural economy; and to create centres of research and development excellence. All these areas have been seriously neglected for decades, displaced by investment into the military, into oppressive wars against ethnic minorities, into the police state apparatus, and most recently into industrial parks which concentrate resources rather than spreading employment and technology across the country.

Myanmar could consider an enlightened form of government-led 'industrial strategy', building on some of the East and South Asian policy paths, defining and costing out its economic development options. Such an approach would, for example, selectively promote sectors and areas for domestic and international entrepreneurship and investment while demanding that they ensure employment, decent work, learning and innovation transfers. The recent introduction of labour standards would fit in constructively with such a strategy, if the population, now subsisting on one of the lowest per capita incomes in South-East Asia, could benefit from

decent employment and work conditions, and enjoy wages and salaries commensurate with the country's overall economic wealth.

Myanmar also has the means, if it so decides, to universalise social protection. This is necessary from a social justice point of view and because currently, only 1% of the population is covered by social security. Social security benefits for the government sector have recently been increased, and a few groups receive poverty- or emergency-related income transfers, but there is no systematic health insurance or income poverty response.

One interesting idea in this connection that is currently capturing the imagination of global development policy discourse is the United Nations' social protection floors initiative, which is a concept that proposes a guaranteed basic income plus guaranteed access to high-quality, inclusive social services. A reforming Myanmar could explore such a 'floor' specific to its citizens' interests.

A combination of the decent work and social protection agendas with an industrial strategy could help address the country's dire poverty and income inequality and stark urban-rural disparities, and perhaps also address the pervasive and even violent forms of social exclusion based on ethnicity in the country's mountainous regions. The three agendas could be a tool for social inclusion, as well as facilitate environmentally sustainable production and a move away from the lucrative but pernicious narcotics cultivation. In short, Myanmar could take the lead in creating a democratic developmental welfare state, with its citizens emerging from poverty and political oppression – and thereby also inspire many other countries. ♦

Gabriele Köhler is a development economist and visiting fellow at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, UK. The above is an updated version (February 2012) of an article published (with references) on the IDEAs (International Development Economics Associates) website (networkideas.org, 6 January 2012).

João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920-1999), considered one of Brazil's greatest poets, was well known for his innovative 'poetry of concrete' with its minimal display of emotion. A diplomat by profession, he was the recipient of some of the most prestigious literary awards in the Portuguese-speaking world.

The drafted vulture

João Cabral de Melo Neto

When the droughts hit the backland they make
the vulture into a civil servant – free no more.
He doesn't try to escape. He's known for a long time
that they'd put his technique and his touch to use.
He says nothing of services rendered, of diplomas
which entitle him to better pay.
He serves the drought-dealers like an altar-boy,
with a greenhorn zeal, veteran though he is,
mercifully dispatching some who may not be dead,
when in private life he cares only for bona fide corpses.

Though the vulture's a conscript, you can soon tell
from his demeanour that he's a real professional:
his self-conscious air, hunched and advisory,
his umbrella-completeness, the clerical smoothness
with which he acts, even in a minor capacity –
an unquestioning liberal professional.

Translated by WS Merwin