Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

NEWSCLIPPINGS AND ARTICLES ON POLITICAL CONFLICT

July 1-15, 2009

INFORMATION SERVICES DIVISION
ISIS MALAYSIA

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2009

Global View / *By Bret Stephens*

Obama's Obsolete Iran Policy

President Obama's Iran policy is incoherent and obsolete. Maybe David Axelrod should take note.

On Sunday, Mr. Obama's consigliere was asked about Iran by ABC's George Stephanopoulos and NBC's David Gregory. Mr. Gregory asked whether there "should be consequences" for the regime's violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations. "The consequences, I think, will unfold over time in Iran," answered Mr. Axelrod.

Mr. Stephanopoulos quoted Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as saying that "this time, the Iranian nation's reply will be harsh and more decisive to make the West regret its meddlesome stance." Said Mr. Axelrod, "I'm not going to entertain his bloviations that are politically motivated." As for whether the administration wasn't selling short the demonstrators, Mr. Axelrod could only say that "the president's sense of solicitude with those young people has been very, very clear."

Bottom line from Mr. Axelrod, and presumably Mr. Obama, too: "We are going to continue to work through . . . the multilateral group of nations that are engaging Iran, and they have to make a decision, George, whether they want to further isolate themselves in every way from the community of nations, or whether they are going to embrace that."

Translation: People of Iran—best of luck!

For a president who came into office literally selling the Audacity of Hope—not just for Americans but for all mankind—his Iran policy can so far be summed up as the timidity of "realism." That's realism as a theory of international relations that prescribes a foreign policy based on ostensibly rational calculations of the national interest and assumes that other nations act in similarly rational fashion.

On this reasoning, it remains the American interest to reach a negotiated settlement with Tehran over its nuclear program, whether or not Ahmadinejad was fairly elected. Likewise, it is in Tehran's best interests to settle, assuming the benefits for doing so are sufficiently large.

Associated Press

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

If this view ever had its moment, it was in the months immediately after Mr. Obama's inauguration. The administration came to town thinking that America's problems with Iran were largely self-inflicted—a combination of "Axis of Evil" and "regime change" rhetoric, an invasion that gave Iran a reasonable motive for wanting to arm itself with nuclear weapons, and an unwillingness to try to settle differences in face-to-face talks.

In other words, Mr. Obama seems to have thought that a considerable part of America's Iran problem was simply an America problem, to be addressed by various forms of conciliation: Mr. Obama's New Year's greetings to "the Islamic Republic of Iran"; the disavowal of regime change as a U.S. objective; the offer of direct talks without preconditions; withdrawal from Iraq; the insistence, following the election, that the U.S. would neither presume to judge the outcome nor otherwise "meddle" in an internal Iranian affair.

What did all this achieve? Iran's nuclear programs are accelerating. It is testing ballistic missiles of increasing range and sophistication. Its support for terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah is unabated. Ahmadinejad stole an election in broad daylight. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei blessed the result. British Embassy staff are under siege. A campaign of mass arrests and intimidation is underway and a young woman named Neda Soltan was shot in the heart simply for choosing none of the above.

Oh, and Iran still accuses the U.S. of "meddling."

Now Mr. Obama is promising more of the same, plus the equivalent of a group hug for the demonstrators. Is this supposed to be "realism"?

A more common sense form of realism would reach different conclusions. One is that the "bloviations" of Ahmadinejad are not just politically motivated, but are also expressions of contempt for Mr. Obama. That contempt springs from a keen nose for weakness, honed by the habits of dictatorship and based on an estimate—so far unrefuted—of Mr. Obama's mettle.

Second, as long as Tehran can murder its own people, scoff at a U.S. president and flout U.N. resolutions without consequence, it will continue to do so.

Third is that the Achilles Heel of the Iranian regime isn't its "isolation." (What kind of isolation is it when Ahmadinejad's "election" was instantly ratified by Russian President Dimitry Medvedev?) Nor is it its vulnerability to a gasoline embargo, vulnerable though it is. Its real weakness is its own domestic unpopularity, which has at last found expression in a massive opposition movement.

The fourth is that Iran's nuclear programs have now reached the stage where they can only be stopped through military strikes—probably Israeli—or an internal political decision to abandon them. The prospect of another Mideast war can't exactly please the administration. So how about trying to achieve the same result by leveraging point No. 3?

Maybe ordinary Iranians welcome Mr. Obama's solicitude. What they need is Mr. Obama's spine. If that means "democracy promotion" and tough talk about "regime change," well, it wouldn't be the first time this president has made his predecessor's policy his own.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
THURSDAY, JULY 2, 2009

U.N. Mission To Nowhere

By Bertil Lintner

There is little hope for a release of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi when United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visits the country tomorrow. So far, the ruling military junta has ignored all calls by the international community for a negotiated solution to the country's political problems. Mr. Ban's visit will follow eight previous visits by U.N. envoy Ibrahim Gambari—all of which failed to achieve anything but a few cosmetic changes and publicity stunts. Once the dust has settled, it has always been business as usual.

The fundamental flaw in the U.N.'s approach to Burma is that it fails to take into account how transitions from authoritarianism to more pluralistic societies have occurred in Asia. At a U.N. press briefing June 29, a spokesman said Mr. Ban plans to focus on three issues during his visit to Burma: the resumption of dialogue between the junta and the opposition, a process of "national reconciliation," and the creation of "a condition conducive to credible elections in 2010."

Ban Ki-moon

However, it would be difficult to "resume" a dialogue that has never begun. The junta has never mentioned "national reconciliation" in its announcements to the people of Burma—only "national reconsolidation," code for perpetuating military rule without the participation of the opposition. The belief that the leader of the junta, Gen. Than Shwe, and Ms. Suu Kyi would sit down and discuss the country's future is outright naïve.

History has shown authoritarian regimes never negotiate away their hold on power. They crumble when someone inside the establishment refuses to carry out certain orders. Some observers liken Burma to South Africa, where negotiations did lead to democratization, but this comparison is misleading. South Africa had white minority rule over a black and colored majority. It was not a military dictatorship even remotely comparable with Burma's political structure.

A better comparison for future political scenarios in Burma might be found in the Philippines or in Indonesia. Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos fell in early 1986 when then-defense minister, Juan Ponce Enrile, and Fidel Ramos, then head of the Philippine Constabulary, refused to obey orders to suppress massive demonstrations in Manila and elsewhere. They sided with the opposition—and Marcos had to flee the country. Similarly in Indonesia in May 1998, troops refused to storm the parliamentary buildings in Jakarta that had been occupied by pro-democracy students and other activists. At first, heavily armed troops surrounded the complex—and then they left. The chain of events in Indonesia are more obscure than in the Philippines, but the withdrawal of troops from the parliament marked the beginning of the end of the rule of the old dictator, Suharto. A transitional period followed which eventually led to the establishment of functioning democracy in Indonesia.

South Korea's democratic transition was also catalyzed by defectors from inside the government. In 1979 the country's powerful intelligence chief Kim Jae-gyu assassinated then President Park Chung-hee, for which Kim was in turn executed in 1980. The South Korea government spent several years trying to suppress the country's pro-democracy movement, culminating with a massacre in the city of Gwangju in May of 1980. But in the end South Korea became a thriving democracy—and the assassination of the authoritarian Park marked the beginning of the end of the old regime.

In Taiwan, democracy came after years of antigovernment street demonstrations throughout the 1980s. The final transition to democracy was comparatively smooth. But Taiwan is unique: It has to survive in the shadow of China, and being a democracy is a strong card it needs to play in international diplomacy.

The only Asian country where authoritarianism has been replaced by democracy through dialogue and elections is the Maldives—but this is a special case. In October 2008, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom lost the election and handed power to Mohammed Nasheed, a pro-democracy activist and former political prisoner. But even that transition came after violent protests in 2004 and 2005. The December 2004 tsunami had devastated the Maldives and turned many against the country's inept leadership. But it should also be remembered that the Maldives is a small country of just 300,000 inhabitants, and the economy is heavily dependent on tourism and, by extension, the country's international reputation.

The U.N. has not learned from this history. In nearly two decades, the U.N. has sent envoy after envoy to Burma, with no consequential results. The first "independent expert" the U.N. sent to the country to study violations of human rights was Sadako Ogata, a Japanese professor who later went on to become the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. The report she submitted to the U.N.'s Commission of Human Rights in December 1990, was unusually bland for a rights advocate. General elections had been held that year in May, resulting in a landslide victory for Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party and Ms. Ogata concluded in her report that "it is not in dispute that it will be the task of the elected representatives of the National Assembly to draft a new constitution, on the basis of which a new government will be formed."

Aung San Suu Kyi

But the assembly was never convened. Instead the government began arresting elected MPs and three years later formed a "constituent assembly" consisting of mostly handpicked people to draw up a new constitution. In subsequent years, a slew of U.N. envoys could do nothing to change this. Eighteen years later, in May last year, a seriously flawed referendum was held that "affirmed" that constitution. Parliamentary elections under this new constitution are scheduled for 2010.

Change in Burma is not going to happen through some kind of U.N.-initiated dialogue. The country's military regime has on several occasions sent out "feelers" to various opposition personalities within the country and in exile, but these moves should be seen in the context of divide-and-rule rather than some sincere desire to discuss important matters with anyone outside the generals' own ranks.

While the opposition remains weak and factionalized, the military leaders have over the years showed a remarkable ability to sort out conflicts among themselves to maintain unity. The 2010 election is only designed to institutionalize the present order. Like in other countries in Asia, change will come when someone within the ruling elite turns against the top leadership. But, at least for now, there are no signs of such discontent within Burma's military establishment. This is the bitter reality and there is little meaning in the U.N.'s false hopes for Burma.

Mr. Lintner is a Swedish journalist based in Thailand and author of several books on Burma.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
FRIDAY - SUNDAY, JULY 3 - 5, 2009

Pyongyang Pressure Points

By Christian Whiton

Governments on both sides of the North Pacific may soon have stronger policies toward North Korea than they have in years. The question is how far democratic capitals will press North Korea to renounce its nuclear weapons programs. A key test is whether they can maintain pressure until the Pyongyang regime verifiably ends its misconduct. This is no small threat; Pyongyang has recently tested nuclear and ballistic missile weapons, not to mention its nuclear technology proliferation to terrorist-supporting states and its infamous human-rights abuses.

> Financial sanctions are just the beginning of the effort.

The U.S. is focusing, for now, on financial sanctions. On June 30, the U.S. Treasury Department froze the assets of an Iranian company that provided support to a North Korean bank involved in proliferation. The U.S. State Department also took action that day against a trading company for its involvement in North Korea's nuclear proliferation network. But far more promising are actions reportedly planned by the Treasury against 17 banks and companies involved in North Korea's proliferation enterprise. If the past is any indication, acting against these institutions could rapidly bring the Pyongyang regime to heel.

In 2005, the Treasury designated a Macau-based institution, Banco Delta Asia, as a "primary money laundering concern" under Section 311 of the Patriot Act. This prevented U.S. banks from maintaining corresponding accounts or business with the entity. In effect, the designated bank was prevented from engaging in dollar-denominated transactions. Furthermore, the designation caused local regulators—in this case the Macanese—to freeze several accounts related to the money laundering. Other banks also refused to do business with the organization.

The Kim Jong Il regime was apoplectic. Despite the relatively small amount of funds involved—less than $25 million in the frozen accounts—the action effectively constrained the regime's ability to bring home the fruits of global proliferation and other illicit activities like counterfeiting and drug trafficking. The Kim regime maintains its power by pleasing a small elite in part through luxury goods purchased with this cash. Cutting off the repatriation of cash to North Korea makes proliferation pointless and places the regime in mortal danger as it can no longer buy the love of its enablers.

Reports from the Treasury that it is examining similar actions signal a willingness in some precincts of the Obama administration to pressure Pyongyang for the first time since 2005. At the same time, governments in Seoul and Tokyo are fed up with Kim Jong Il after two sets of ballistic missile and nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, and the reneging by Pyongyang on its promises to disarm made in exchange for foreign assistance. The Lee Myung-bak government in South Korea has curtailed investment in a joint industrial project inside North Korea that had netted the regime hundreds of millions. Mr. Lee also cut other aid to the North and has spoken plainly about the Pyongyang's conduct and the farce that it had made of the disarmament talks. Similarly, the Japanese—alarmed at North Korea's steadily improving nuclear capabilities and also its past abduction of Japanese citizens—has started a renewed crackdown on capital and labor flows to the North.

Thus after two U.S. administrations that ended up supporting North Korea with foreign aid in return for predictably false promises from the regime to disarm, conditions appear better than ever for a stronger policy based on multilateral pressure against Pyongyang. China remains the odd man out, paying lip service to pressuring North Korea but taking few steps to do so. Luckily the financial steps being contemplated can proceed without China.

Kim Jong Il

The challenge ahead will be to sustain the pressure and develop a multifaceted approach to North Korea. First, the Obama administration must not ease pressure too soon or in return only for talks. A successful strategy has to comprise more than just getting the regime back to the negotiating table, which is a means—not an end. Second, security issues should be on the agenda, as well as human rights. Ultimately the threat posed by North Korea will not be relieved until the nature of the regime changes.

As part of a sustained multifaceted effort, free societies need to help the North Korean people rid themselves of the regime. The U.S. and its allies can negotiate over nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and proliferation, but must also insist on including mechanisms that will open North Korea and expedite the regime's deterioration. The Obama administration should start with a U.S. embassy in Pyongyang, but only if North Koreans can apply there for visas or asylum. The U.S. should increase interaction between North Koreans and people from free societies and entice high-level defectors from North Korea. The U.S. also needs to expand independent radio broadcasting into the North from abroad and find ways to get visitors from free countries into their universities and other institutions. Private commerce should be encouraged, in part through exchanges involving foreign businesspeople.

Why would Pyongyang even entertain these matters, when it would prefer to discuss the narrow issue of its nuclear program, on which it has outmaneuvered the outside world in negotiations repeatedly? It won't—unless forced. The U.S., South Korea and Japan must leave open only the comparatively worse option of continued crippling financial activities. Only under that condition can an effective negotiation with the current North Korean regime take place.

Mr. Whiton was an official in the George W. Bush administration from 2003-2009 and served as deputy special envoy for North Korean human rights issues. He is a policy adviser to the Foreign Policy Initiative.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
TUESDAY, JULY 7, 2009

Obama's Mission to Moscow

By David Satter

MOSCOW—President Barack Obama arrives here this week facing a dilemma of his own making. Having called for a "reset" in U.S.-Russian relations, the U.S. side is virtually obliged to make some new overtures. But Russia does not need to be engaged. It needs to be deterred.

The expectations that Mr. Obama has inspired are substantial. Both officials and ordinary citizens in Russia interpret the call for a reset as an admission of U.S. guilt for ignoring Russia's interests. Sergei Rybakov, the Russian deputy foreign minister, said that mutual trust was "lacking over the last several years." It was the task of the U.S. to show its good intentions with "concrete actions" because in Russia, the U.S. is "deeply distrusted."

Accepting the Russian view of reality on the issues that divide the U.S. and Russia, however, would be a grave mistake. Russia aspires to resurrect a version of the Soviet Union in which it projects power and dominates its neighbors. To encourage its ambitions in any way would be to undermine not only U.S. security but, in the long run, the security of Russia as well.

There are three important areas of conflict between the U.S. and Russia: NATO expansion, the U.S. missile shield in Eastern Europe and the Russian human rights situation. In each case, any reset should be on the Russian side.

The most urgent issue may be NATO expansion. There are serious indications that Russia is preparing for a second invasion of Georgia. The first Georgian war was accompanied by a burst of patriotism in Russia but didn't achieve its strategic objectives. Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili remains in power and Georgia remains a supply corridor to the West for energy from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea. Many Russians leaders want to finish the job. At a televised forum in December, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was asked about press reports that he had told French president Nicolas Sarkozy that Mr. Saakashvili should be "hung by his ba**s." He replied, "Why only by one part?"

Under these circumstances, the best protection for Georgia is NATO membership. According to Pavel Felgenhauer, a defense analyst with Novaya Gazeta, the decision to invade Georgia last August came in April after NATO failed to offer outright a Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine at its annual summit in Bucharest.

Russia will argue strenuously that Georgia, Ukraine and the other former Soviet republics are part of its sphere of "privileged interests." This is an issue on which Mr. Obama cannot give way. If the former Soviet republics are denied NATO membership at Russia's behest, they either will be turned into Russian satellites with manipulated elections and a controlled foreign policy or form a zone of instability along Russia's borders with unpredictable consequences for both Russia and the West.

Beside the issue of NATO expansion, Russia and the U.S. have a critical conflict over U.S. plans to install a missile shield in the Czech Republic and Poland. Not only have U.S. experts argued that the anti-missile system is not aimed at Russia but Russia's military experts agree. Nonetheless, the system is described by Russian leaders as a threat and denunciations of the missile shield are a staple of the anti-Western programming on Russian state television.

According to Mikhail Delyagin, who served as an adviser to former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, the placement of rockets in Poland is unacceptable to Russia for emotional and symbolic reasons. "It shows that the U.S. is now the master in Eastern Europe," he said. Any decision to yield to Russian objections, however, would effectively divide NATO into countries that need Russian approval for deployments and those that do not. Even dubious Russian promises to help with Iran would not compensate for the damage done to the alliance by such a concession to Russian pretensions.

Finally, there is the conflict between Russia and the U.S. over human rights. The status of human rights is a universal concern but it also has strategic implications. A population that lacks democratic rights and is subject to constant anti-Western propaganda can easily be mobilized against the U.S.

By any measure, the state of human rights in Russia is unacceptable. Russia today lacks honest elections or a separation of powers. The regime allows a degree of freedom but the features of daily life include police torture, prisoner abuse, political control of the courts and, for democratic activists, the danger of being beaten or killed. The result is that fear has returned to Russia less than two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The regime is also taking steps to curtail freedom of speech. Freedom of the press has long been restricted under Mr. Putin with censorship on state run television and pressure on newspapers through their owners, to exercise self censorship. Peaceful demonstrations have also been forcibly dispersed. In recent weeks, however, a bill has been introduced in the State Duma that would make it illegal to deny the role of the Soviet Union in the victory in World War II or the crimes of Hitler's cronies (but not the crimes of Stalin and his entourage). The punishment both for Russian citizens and for foreigners will be three to five years in prison.

In the run up to Mr. Obama's visit, Russian academics and self described realists in the U.S. have called for a "grand deal" in which the U.S. accedes to Russian demands in the former Soviet Union in return for Russian help on Iran, North Korea and Afghanistan. In the case of Iran, Russia, which has repeatedly thwarted tough United Nations resolutions on that country's nuclear energy program, is offering to assist in dealing with a problem that it helped to create.

Unfortunately such a deal, the only "reset" in which the Russians have shown any interest, would eliminate moral criteria from the U.S.-Russian relationship, and deprive the U.S. of any basis for limiting Russia's demands in the future. Under those circumstances, Russia's appetite is likely to grow.

Mr. Obama may wish to improve the U.S.-Russia relationship but the problems in that relationship come not from our actions but from assumptions on the Russian side about the prerogatives of power that we cannot possibly accept. Instead of resetting relations, we may just have to content ourselves with resisting Russian pretensions until such time as the mentality that gives rise to them can be changed.

Mr. Satter is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and a visiting scholar at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He is writing a book on the Russian attitude to the Soviet past.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
TUESDAY, JULY 7, 2009

Malaysia's Anwar set to go on trial

Proceedings against opposition leader may end up strengthening his political movement, some analysts say

By James Hookway

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim is due to go on trial Wednesday, in a proceeding that could reinforce his political support, some political analysts say.

Mr. Anwar faces sodomy charges. His first sodomy trial, in 1998, ended in conviction and imprisonment, setting back Malaysia's nascent opposition movement several years. This time, Mr. Anwar's allies have grown into a significant political force and are better equipped to survive. If Mr. Anwar is found guilty and imprisoned, some analysts say it could strengthen the opposition.

James Chin, a political-science professor at the Malaysian campus of Australia's Monash University, says "Mr. Anwar could emerge as a martyr for the opposition," strengthening the movement's hand in the next general elections, which must be held by 2013.

The 61-year-old Mr. Anwar, who was elected to Parliament last year, denies the past and current sodomy allegations, saying the charges were fabricated by political enemies to destroy his reputation. Mr. Anwar didn't specify whom he suspected was behind the charges.

Mr. Anwar faces his second trial after a 23-year-old former volunteer in his office, Mohamad Saiful Bukhari Azlan, last year accused Mr. Anwar of sodomizing him—a crime in this predominantly Muslim country.

Reuters

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim speaks during an interview at his office in the Parliament building in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, last month.

Members of Mr. Anwar's defense team say they have obtained medical records stating that Mr. Saiful was examined and found not to have been sodomized. Mr. Saiful couldn't be reached to comment.

Prime Minister Najib Razak has denied having anything to do with the latest charges against Mr. Anwar.

In 1998, Mahathir Mohamad, then prime minister, dismissed Mr. Anwar from his posts as deputy prime minister and finance minister for challenging Malaysia's economic policies at the height of Asia's financial crisis. Two years later, Mr. Anwar was convicted of sodomizing two male aides. He was jailed until 2004, when his conviction was overturned.

Mr. Mahathir has repeatedly denied that he had anything to do with the earlier allegations against Mr. Anwar.

Mr. Anwar has become the linchpin of a strengthening opposition alliance that last year broke the ruling National Front's two-thirds majority in parliament for the first time in decades.

Few Malaysians say they believe the charges against Mr. Anwar. In a national survey conducted last year by a Malaysian polling institute after his arrest in July only 11% of respondents said they thought there was any credibility to the allegations against Mr. Anwar.

In recent weeks, Prime Minister Najib has tried to stake out his credentials as a reformer, to revive the economy and win voters from Mr. Anwar's alliance.

With Malaysia's economy facing its steepest contraction this year since the Asian crisis of 1998, Mr. Najib has opened up large areas of the Malaysian economy to foreign investment by rolling back race-based affirmative-action policies designed to give a boost to the majority ethnic-Malay population. Among other measures, the amount of equity to be reserved for ethnic-Malay investors at initial public offerings was lowered to 12.5% from 30%.

Many economists hailed the moves as a step in the right direction to help Malaysia become more competitive with neighbors such as Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam and China at a time when foreign investment around the world is declining.

Now Mr. Najib's reforms risk being overshadowed by the Anwar trial. A number of political analysts point to widespread popular suspicion that the Malaysian authorities orchestrated the allegations against Mr. Anwar to stop him from taking power in parliament.

The U.S. and Amnesty International have expressed worries about the proceedings against Mr. Anwar, with the State Department last year stating that it had "serious concern" about the impartial rule of law in Malaysia.

While fighting his legal battle, Mr. Anwar will have to keep his unwieldy opposition alliance together. The alliance comprises a hard-line Islamist party, a secularly, largely ethnic-Chinese party, and Mr. Anwar's own multiracial People's Justice Party.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 2009

Arms Control Amnesia

By Keith B. Payne

Three hours after arriving at the Kremlin Monday, President Barack Obama signed a preliminary agreement on a new nuclear arms-control treaty with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. The agreement—a clear road map for a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)—commits the U.S. and Russia to cut their nuclear weapons to the lowest levels since the early years of the Cold War.

Mr. Obama praised the agreement as a step forward, away from the "suspicion and rivalry of the past," while Mr. Medvedev hailed it as a "reasonable compromise." In fact, given the range of force levels it permits, this agreement has the potential to compromise U.S. security—depending on what happens next.

In the first place, locking in specific reductions for U.S. forces prior to the conclusion of the ongoing Nuclear Posture Review is putting the cart before the horse. The Obama administration's team at the Pentagon is currently examining U.S. strategic force requirements. Before specific limits are set on U.S. forces, it should complete the review.

Second, the new agreement not only calls for reductions in the number of nuclear warheads (to between 1,500 and 1,675), but for cuts in the number of strategic force launchers. Under the 1991 START I Treaty, each side was limited to 1,600 launchers. Monday's agreement calls for each side to be limited to between 500 and 1,100 launchers each.

According to open Russian sources, it was Russia that pushed for the lower limit of 500 launchers in negotiations. In the weeks leading up to this summit, it also has been openly stated that Moscow would like the number of deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched missiles (SLBMS), and strategic bombers to be reduced "several times" below the current limit of 1,600. Moving toward very low numbers of launchers is a smart position for Russia, but not for the U.S.

Why? Because the number of deployed Russian strategic ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers will drop dramatically simply as a result of their aging. In other words, a large number of Russian launchers will be removed from service with or without a new arms-control agreement.

The Obama administration will undoubtedly come under heavy pressure to move to the low end of the 500-1,100 limit on launchers to match Russian reductions. But it need not and should not do so. Based solely on open Russian sources, by 2017-2018 Russia will likely have fewer than half of the approximately 680 operational launchers it has today. With a gross domestic product less than that of California, Russia is confronting the dilemma of how to maintain parity with the U.S. while retiring its many aged strategic forces.

> The United States gave up weapons and gained nothing in return.

Mr. Medvedev's solution is to negotiate, inviting the U.S. to make real cuts, while Russia eliminates nothing that it wouldn't retire in any event.

This isn't just my conclusion—it's the conclusion of many Russian officials and commentators. Russian Gen. Nikolay Solovtsov, commander of the Strategic Missile Troops, was recently quoted by Moscow Interfax-AVN Online as saying that "not a single Russian launcher" with "remaining service life" will be withdrawn under a new agreement. Noted Russian journalist Pavel Felgengauer observed in Novaya Gazeta that Russian leaders "have demanded of the Americans unilateral concessions on all points, offering practically nothing in exchange." Precisely.

Beyond the bad negotiating principle of giving up something for nothing, there will be serious downsides if the U.S. actually reduces its strategic launchers as much as Moscow wishes. Having very low numbers of launchers would make the U.S. more vulnerable to destabilizing first-strike dangers, and would reduce or eliminate the U.S. ability to adapt its nuclear deterrent to an increasingly diverse set of post-Cold War nuclear and biological weapons threats.

Accepting low launcher numbers would also encourage placing more warheads on the remaining ICBMs—i.e., "MIRVing," or adding multiple independently targeted warheads on a single missile. This is what the Russians openly say they are planning to do. Yet the U.S. has long sought to move away from MIRVed ICBMs as part of START, because heavy MIRVing can make each ICBM a more tempting target.

Third, the new agreement appears to defer the matter of so-called tactical nuclear weapons. Russia has some 4,000 tactical nuclear weapons and many thousands more in reserve; U.S. officials have said that Russia has an astounding 10 to 1 numerical advantage. These weapons are of greatest concern with regard to the potential for nuclear war, and they should be America's focus for arms reduction. Yet at this point, they appear to be off the table.

The administration may hope to negotiate reductions in tactical nuclear weapons later. But Russia has rejected this in the past, and nothing seems to have changed. As Gen. Vladimir Dvorkin of the Russian Academy of Sciences said recently in Moscow Interfax-AVN Online, "A treaty on the limitation and reduction of tactical nuclear weapons looks absolutely unrealistic." If the U.S. hopes to address this real problem, it must maintain negotiating leverage in the form of strategic launchers and weapons.

Fourth, Mr. Medvedev was quoted recently in RIA Novosti as saying that strategic reductions are possible only if the U.S. alleviates Russian concerns about "U.S. plans to create a global missile defense." There will surely be domestic and international pressure on the U.S. to limit missile defense to facilitate Russian reductions under the new treaty. But the U.S. need for missile defense has little to do with Russia. And the value of missile defense could not be clearer given recent North Korean belligerence. The Russians are demanding this linkage, at least in part to kill our missile defense site in Europe intended to defend against Iranian missiles.

In short, Russian leaders hope to control or eliminate many elements of U.S. military power in exchange for strategic force reductions they will have to make anyway. U.S. leaders should not agree to pay Russia many times over for essentially an empty box.

* * *

Finally, Russian violations of its existing arms-control commitments must be addressed along with any new commitments. According to an August 2005 State Department report, Russia has violated START verification and other arms-control commitments in multiple ways. One significant violation has even been discussed openly in Russian publications—the testing of the SS-27 ICBM with MIRVs in direct violation of START I.

President Obama should recall Winston Churchill's warning: "Be careful above all things not to let go of the atomic weapon until you are sure and more than sure that other means of preserving peace are in your hands." There is no need for the U.S. to accept Russian demands for missile-defense linkage, or deep reductions in the number of our ICBMs, SLBMs and bombers, to realize much lower numbers of Russian strategic systems. There is also no basis for expecting Russian goodwill if we do so.

Mr. Payne, a professor of defense and strategic studies at Missouri State University, is a member of the Perry-Schlesinger Commission, which was established by Congress to assess U.S. nuclear weapons capabilities. This op-ed is adapted from testimony given before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on June 24.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2009

Malaysia court delays trial of opposition leader

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KUALA LUMPUR—Malaysia's High Court on Wednesday postponed opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy trial by at least one week after his main defense lawyer fell ill.

The long-awaited trial had been scheduled to start Wednesday, but his attorneys said their top representative was hospitalized for dizzy spells. On July 15, the court will set a new date for the trial.

Mr. Anwar, 61 years old, was charged in August 2008 with sodomizing a 23-year-old male former aide. He has denied the charge. He faces up to 20 years in prison if convicted of sodomy, a crime in Muslim-majority Malaysia.

It is the second time that the former deputy prime minister has been accused of sodomy. He spent six years in prison from 1998 to 2004 after being convicted of corruption and of sodomizing his former family driver. Mr. Anwar insisted he had been framed and was freed when Malaysia's top court overturned the sodomy conviction.

Mr. Anwar reiterated his claim Wednesday that the new sodomy charge was part of a government conspiracy to undermine his three-party opposition alliance, which made big gains in general elections last year. Government officials, including Prime Minister Najib Razak, have denied any plot against Mr. Anwar.

Meanwhile, the independent Merdeka Center research firm said that Mr. Najib's approval rating had surged to 65% from 42% in May, based on a recent telephone survey of about 1,000 registered voters.

The Merdeka Center said the results indicate that a rising number of Malaysians appreciate decisions Mr. Najib made after he took office in April. He has tried to tackle ethnic minorities' complaints of discrimination, such as by cutting back affirmative-action programs for the Malay Muslim majority.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2009

G-8 leaders outline program to fight hunger

By Luca Di Leo
And Henry Pulizzi

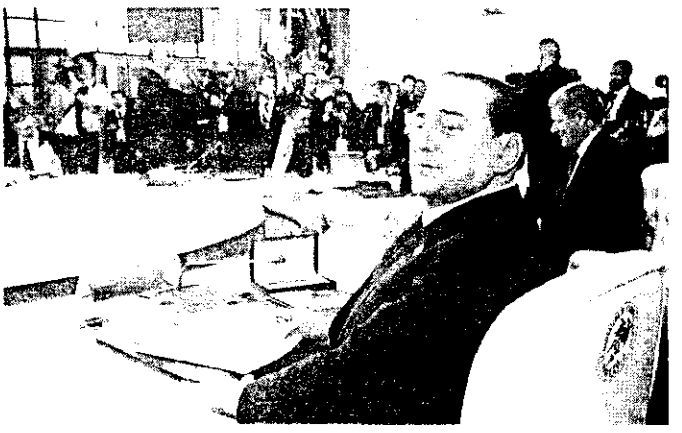
ROME –World leaders meeting in Italy are expected to commit as much as $15 billion to agricultural projects over the next three years to try to reduce world hunger and ease food-price volatility.

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi told a news conference Tuesday that leaders of the Group of Eight nations could agree to provide farm aid of $10 billion to $15 billion. Leaders of the G-8 on Wednesday began to meet in the mountainous town of L'Aquila.

The U.S.-backed program would fund agricultural projects in developing countries, providing farmers with seed, fertilizer and equipment. It will "help all the people in the world who suffer from hunger," Mr. Berlusconi said.

Not everyone is convinced. The G-8 has made unfulfilled aid pledges to the developing world before, leaving some analysts skeptical about the latest plan.

Volatile food prices stoked global tension last year, sparking riots in some countries, sometimes as production and prices both remained high. Though many crop prices have since fallen back, the unrest helped make the complex issue of food security a major focus for G-8 political leaders, who are concerned about social and political consequences.



Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, shown at the G-8 summit on Wednesday, said developing countries could get farm aid of $10 billion to $15 billion.

The world consumed more grain than its farmers could produce for most of this decade, thanks to surging food demand from a growing middle class in emerging nations and production of biofuels for industrial nations. Even large harvests last fall and the global recession this year haven't returned prices of many crops back to their normal levels.

Last month, a United Nations agency predicted the number of people going hungry daily will reach 1.02 billion this year. U.S. Department of Agriculture economists have also made dire projections, citing affordability as the cause even when world-wide grain stocks are high.

Unlike past G-8 aid initiatives, the proposal set for announcement in L'Aquila would focus specifically on agriculture, according to a senior U.S. official. It would aim to boost production by providing farmers in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world with seed and fertilizer, the official said. Investment in agricultural storage and infrastructure is to be pledged as well in order to ease access for farmers to markets where they might trade their crops, the official said.

Analysts cited disappointing follow-through on past pledges as a source of concern. "It sounds like a good plan, but we'll have to see how much of the money will really be new investments and how much of the funds pledged will then be delivered," said Carlo Fadda, a consultant at Bioversity, a Rome-based global agricultural research institute. Another analyst wondered whether small farmers will benefit and if buyers will be able to afford food.

In a 2005 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland, for example, the G-8 pledged to collectively raise aid to developing countries by around $50 billion annually by 2010. Yet, international campaigners say steps to reach the goal have been slow.

The G-8 has so far delivered only a third of the Africa aid pledged at the 2005 summit, according to a nongovernmental group named ONE, run by the musician Bono.

Earlier this week, Irish singer Bob Geldof, who also campaigns for ONE, told an Italian newspaper that Mr. Berlusconi's credibility was at stake as his government had delivered only 3% of its 2005 pledge. In the same La Stampa newspaper report, Mr. Berlusconi acknowledged Italy's "mistake."

"I regret I have not been able to keep the promises," the prime minister said.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
FRIDAY - SUNDAY, JULY 10 - 12, 2009

Burma and North Korea, Brothers in Arms

By Aung Zaw

The North Korean ship that tried to steam to Burma last month isn't the only problem facing the U.S. and its allies. There's a much broader military relationship growing between the two pariah states—one that poses a growing threat to stability in Asia-Pacific.

A government report leaked by a Burmese official last month shed new light on these ties. It described a Memorandum of Understanding between Burma and North Korea signed during a secret visit by Burmese officials to Pyongyang in November 2008. The visit was the culmination of years of work. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were cut in 1983 following a failed assassination attempt by North Korean agents on the life of South Korean President Chun Doo Hwan while he was visiting Rangoon. The attack cost 17 Korean lives and Burma cut off ties.

One of the first signs of warming relations was a barter agreement between the two countries that lasted from 2000 to 2006 and saw Burma receive between 12 and 16 M-46 field guns and as many as 20 million rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition from North Korea, according to defense analyst Andrew Selth of Griffith University in Australia. In exchange, Burma bartered food and rice.

The two countries formally re-established diplomatic relations in April 2007. After that, the North Korean ship the Kang Nam—the same ship that recently turned away from Burma after being followed by the U.S. navy—made a trip to Burma's Thilawa port. Western defense analysts concluded that the ship carried conventional weapons and missiles to Burma.

This laid the ground for the MoU signed in November, when Shwe Mann, the regime's third-most powerful figure, made a secret visit to North Korea, according to the leaked report. Shwe Mann is the chief of staff of the army, navy and air force, and the coordinator of Special Operations. He spent seven days in Pyongyang, traveling via China. His 17-member delegation received a tour around Pyongyang and Myohyang, where secret tunnels have been built into mountains to shelter aircraft, missiles, tanks and nuclear and chemical weapons.

The MoU he signed formalizes the military cooperation between the two countries. According to the terms of the document, North Korea will build or supervise the construction of special Burmese military facilities, including tunnels and caves in which missiles, aircraft and even naval ships could be hidden. Burma will also receive expert training for its special forces, air defense training, plus a language training program between personnel in the two armed forces.

Shwe Mann's delegation also visited a surface-to-surface missile factory, partially housed in tunnels, on the outskirts of Pyongyang to observe missile production. The Burmese were particularly interested in short-range 107 mm and 240 mm multirocket launchers—a multipurpose, defensive missile system used in case of a foreign invasion. Also of great interest was the latest in antitank, laser-guided missile technology.

To suppress ethic insurgents and urban dissent, the regime doesn't need such sophisticated weapons. Burma's desire for missiles, airborne warning and control system, air defense systems, GPS communication jammers and defensive radar systems indicates that the generals envision both defensive and offensive capabilities.

North Korea's military buildup is often viewed primarily as a security threat to Northeast Asia. But its burgeoning relationship with Burma is a reminder of how easily one rogue regime can empower others. Burma's burning ambition to acquire modern missile technology, if left unchecked, could pose a dangerous destabilizing threat to regional stability.

Mr. Aung Zaw is founder and editor of the Chiang Mai-based Irrawaddy magazine.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

MONDAY, JULY 13, 2009

Indonesia's New New Order

Suharto stepped aside in 1998, but it wasn't until Wednesday that Indonesia put the strongman's 32-year rule firmly behind it. The blowout re-election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono last week was a clear vote against Suharto-era crony politics and for good governance and reform. The challenge now is for Mr. Yudhoyono to use his mandate to liberalize the country even further.

> Voters want honest leadership and real reform.

For those that remember the sphinx-like Suharto years, the three-week presidential campaign was a remarkably transparent affair. All three pairs of candidates—Mr. Yudhoyono and his running mate, Boediono; former President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Prabowo Subianto; and Jusuf Kalla and Wiranto—toured the country extensively and sparred in televised debates to win votes. Indonesia's rowdy press covered the campaign closely.

Mr. Yudhoyono pitched himself as an honest and competent leader. With reason: Under his first term, the Corruption Eradication Commission pursued businesspeople and politicians—including the father-in-law of the president's son. The Finance Ministry attacked graft in the powerful tax and customs offices and instituted pay-for-performance rules. Foreign investment capital started to flow back into the country.

Ms. Megawati and Mr. Kalla had a hard time arguing with that record, so they resorted to personal attacks. Mr. Kalla's Golkar Party posted advertisements showing their candidates' wives wearing Muslim head scarves—sparking a debate on the Islamic credentials of Mr. Yudhoyono's wife, who doesn't wear one. Ms. Megawati's camp and Islamic parties charged Mr. Yudhoyono with blind adherence to "neoliberalist" economic philosophies, though they never clearly defined the term. Neither tack resonated with Indonesia's moderate, mostly Muslim voters.

The vice-presidential candidates' credentials also factored into voters' decisions. Mr. Subianto, Ms. Megawati's running rate, is a former military general associated with a bloody 1998 crackdown on students. The anticorruption commission in May estimated his net worth at $160 million—hard to square with Ms. Megawati's pro-poor economic platform. Mr. Wiranto, who paired with Mr. Kalla, was a high-ranking general under Suharto. The president's pick, Mr. Boediono, is a well-respected economist.

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono

Mr. Yudhoyono and Mr. Boediono, who goes by one name, were heavily favored to win Wednesday's ballot anyway after their Democrat Party won handily in May's legislative elections. But the scale of their victory was a surprise. Preliminary polls put SBY, as the president is nicknamed, with around 60% of the popular vote. The final tally will be released later this month.

Now the challenge is for Messrs. Yudhoyono and Boediono to bear down on corruption further and extend their reformist ideas to other parts of Indonesia's economy. Ripping down barriers to foreign investment such as restrictive labor laws would be a good place to start. Mr. Boediono hinted that he might privatize state-owned industries. He could start by selling off the banks and energy companies.

Much will depend on the ministers they put in place. In his first term, Mr. Yudhoyono depended on coalition partners to govern and thus couldn't fully break Suharto-era ties between business and the bureaucracy. Wednesday's mandate gives him the freedom to put his own people in key ministries such as finance, agriculture and tax. Keeping the effective Finance Minister, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, in a position of power would be a good idea. So, too, would be keeping the Islamic parties out of places like the Education Ministry, where they could spread their Shariah cause.

Suharto's New Order government ruled Indonesia with an iron fist for more than three decades and ushered in an era of economic development coupled with deep cronyism. Mr. Yudhoyono's re-election shows that voters want a new New Order—one based on honest government and a more vibrant private sector.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

MONDAY, JULY 13, 2009

The Journal Interview with James R. Schlesinger / *By Melanie Kirkpatrick*

Why We Don't Want a Nuclear-Free World

MACLEAN, VA.—"Nuclear weapons are used every day." So says former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, speaking last month at his office in a wooded enclave of Maclean, Va. It's a serene setting for Doomsday talk, and Mr. Schlesinger's matter-of-fact tone belies the enormity of the concepts he's explaining—concepts that were seemingly ignored in last week's Moscow summit between Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev.

We use nuclear weapons every day, Mr. Schlesinger goes on to explain, "to deter our potential foes and provide reassurance to the allies to whom we offer protection."

Mr. Obama likes to talk about his vision of a nuclear-free world, and in Moscow he and Mr. Medvedev signed an agreement setting targets for sweeping reductions in the world's largest nuclear arsenals. Reflecting on the hour I spent with Mr. Schlesinger, I can't help but think: Do we really want to do this?

For nuclear strategists, Mr. Schlesinger is Yoda, the master of their universe. In addition to being a former defense secretary (Nixon and Ford), he is a former energy secretary (Carter) and former director of central intelligence (Nixon). He has been studying the U.S. nuclear posture since the early 1960s, when he was at the RAND Corporation, a California think tank that often does research for the U.S. government. He's the expert whom Defense Secretary Robert Gates called on last year to lead an investigation into the Air Force's mishandling of nuclear weapons after nuclear-armed cruise missiles were mistakenly flown across the country on a B-52 and nuclear fuses were accidently shipped to Taiwan. Most recently, he's vice chairman of a bipartisan congressional commission that in May issued an urgent warning about the need to maintain a strong U.S. deterrent.

But above all, Mr. Schlesinger is a nuclear realist. Are we heading toward a nuclear-free world anytime soon? He shoots back a one-word answer: "No." I keep silent, hoping he will go on. "We will need a strong deterrent," he finally says, "and that is measured at least in decades—in my judgment, in fact, more or less in perpetuity. The notion that we can abolish nuclear weapons reflects on a combination of American utopianism and American parochialism. . . . It's like the [1929] Kellogg-Briand Pact renouncing war as an instrument of national policy . . . . It's not based upon an understanding of reality."

In other words: Go ahead and wish for a nuclear-free world, but pray that you don't get what you wish for. A world without nukes would be even more dangerous than a world with them, Mr. Schlesinger argues.

"If, by some miracle, we were able to eliminate nuclear weapons," he says, "what we would have is a number of countries sitting around with breakout capabilities or rumors of breakout capabilities—for intimidation purposes. . . . and finally, probably, a number of small clandestine stockpiles." This would make the U.S. more vulnerable.

Mr. Schlesinger makes the case for a strong U.S. deterrent. Yes, the Cold War has ended and, yes, while "we worry about Russia's nuclear posture to some degree, it is not just as prominent as it once was." The U.S. still needs to deter Russia, which has the largest nuclear capability of any potential adversary, and the Chinese, who have a modest (and growing) capability. The U.S. nuclear deterrent has no influence on North Korea or Iran, he says, or on nonstate actors. "They're not going to be deterred by the possibility of a nuclear response to actions that they might take," he says.

Mr. Schlesinger refers to the unanimous conclusion of the bipartisan Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, which he co-led with Chairman William Perry. The commission "strongly" recommended that further discussions with the Russians on arms control are "desirable," he says, and that "we should proceed with negotiations on an extension of the START Treaty." That's what Mr. Obama set in motion in Moscow last week. The pact—whose full name is the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty—expires in December. But what's the hurry? Mr. Schlesinger warns about rushing to agree on cuts. "The treaty . . . can be extended for five years. And, if need be, I would extend it for five years."

There's another compelling reason for a strong U.S. deterrent: the U.S. nuclear umbrella, which protects more than 30 allies world-wide. "If we were only protecting the North American continent," he says, "we could do so with far fewer weapons than we have at present in the stockpile." But a principal aim of the U.S. nuclear deterrent is "to provide the necessary reassurance to our allies, both in Asia and in Europe." That includes "our new NATO allies such as Poland and the Baltic States," which, he notes dryly, continue to be concerned about their Russian neighbor. "Indeed, they inform us regularly that they understand the Russians far better than do we."

The congressional commission warned of a coming "tipping point" in proliferation, when more nations might decide to go nuclear if they were to lose confidence in the U.S. deterrent, or in Washington's will to use it. If U.S. allies lose confidence in Washington's ability to protect them, they'll kick off a new nuclear arms race.

That's a reason Mr. Schlesinger wants to bring Japan into the nuclear conversation. "One of the recommendations of the commission is that we start to have a dialogue with the Japanese about strategic capabilities in order both to help enlighten them and to provide reassurance that they will be protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella. In the past, that has not been the case. Japan never was seriously threatened by Soviet capabilities and that the Soviets looked westward largely is a threat against Western Europe. But now that the Chinese forces have been growing into the many hundreds of weapons, we think that it's necessary to talk to the Japanese in the same way that we have talked to the Europeans over the years."

He reminds me of the comment of Japanese political leader Ichiro Ozawa, who said in 2002 that it would be "easy" for Japan to make nuclear warheads and that it had enough plutonium to make several thousand weapons. "When one contemplates a number like that," Mr. Schlesinger says, "one sees that a substantial role in nonproliferation has been the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Without that, some and perhaps a fair number of our allies would feel the necessity of having their own nuclear capabilities."

He worries about "contagion" in the Middle East, whereby countries will decide to go nuclear if Iran does. "We've long talked about Iran as a tipping point," he says, "in that it might induce Turkey, which has long been protected under NATO, Egypt [and] Saudi Arabia to respond in kind . . . There has been talk about extending the nuclear umbrella to the Middle East in the event that the Iranians are successful in developing that capacity."

* * *

Mr. Schlesinger expresses concerns, too, about the safety and reliability of U.S. nuclear weapons, all of which are more than 20 years old. "I am worried about the reliability of the weapons . . . as time passes. Not this year, not next year, but as time passes and the stockpile ages." There is a worry, too, about the "intellectual infrastructure," he says, as Americans who know how to make nuclear weapons either retire or die. And he notes that the "physical infrastructure" is now "well over 60 years" old. Some of it "comes out of the Manhattan Project."

The U.S. is the only major nuclear power that is not modernizing its weapons. "The Russians have a shelf life for their weapons of about 10 years so they are continually replacing" them. The British and the French "stay up to date." And the Chinese and the Indians "continue to add to their stockpiles." But in the U.S., Congress won't even so much as fund R&D for the Reliable Replacement Warhead. "The RRW has become a toxic term on Capitol Hill," Mr. Schlesinger says. Give it a new name, he seems to be suggesting, and try again to get Congress to fund it. "We need to be much more vigorous about life-extension programs" for the weapons.

Finally, we chat about Mr. Schlesinger's nearly half-century as a nuclear strategist. Are we living in a world where the use of nuclear weapons is more likely than it was back then? "The likelihood of a nuclear exchange has substantially gone away," he says. That's the good news. "However, the likelihood of a nuclear terrorist attack on the United States" is greater.

During his RAND years, in the 1960s, Mr. Schlesinger recalls that "we were working on mitigating the possible effects [of a nuclear attack] through civil defense, which, may I say parenthetically, we should be working on now with respect, certainly, to the possibility of a terrorist weapon used against the United States. . . . We should have a much more rapid response capability. . . . We're not as well organized as we should be to respond."

Mr. Schlesinger sees another difference between now and when he started in this business: "Public interest in our strategic posture has faded over the decades," he says. "In the Cold War, it was a most prominent subject. Now, much of the public is barely interested in it. And that has been true of the Congress as well," creating what he delicately refers to as "something of a stalemate in expenditures."

He's raising the alarm. Congress, the administration and Americans ignore it at their peril.

Ms. Kirkpatrick is a deputy editor of the Journal's editorial page.

FINANCIAL TIMES FRIDAY JULY 3 2009

The fightback in Afghanistan begins

Little can be achieved without spreading security first

Yesterday's operation by 4,000 US marines in southern Helmand marks the start of a critical new phase in America's Afghan strategy. For years, western leaders have feared that Nato is losing the fight against the Taliban, that the US-led operation is under-resourced, that President Hamid Karzai's government is too weak. Now, hopefully, things are about to change. Barack Obama began as president making clear he wanted to devote more resources to Afghanistan, despatching 21,000 extra US troops to the country. In southern Helmand yesterday, those troops began the fightback.

The Obama administration is right to have begun this full frontal assault on the Taliban's strongholds. Of course, as Mr Obama recognises, many of Afghanistan's problems can only be solved by action outside the military sphere. The security of the region depends on stability in Pakistan as much, if not more, than Afghanistan. Success in Afghanistan also depends on boosting civilian and humanitarian assistance from the west.

But the administration also knows that no progress can be made on any front unless there is first a major improvement in the security situation on the ground – above all in the Taliban's southern heartland. If the Afghan people are to back the country's civil institutions, they must see clear evidence that the core Taliban is either being eliminated or won round. The uneasy stalemate that has reigned for so long in Helmand between British troops and Taliban insurgents is simply not good enough.

Yesterday's action is only a start. There are big challenges ahead. US public opinion must accept that this more proactive phase of the war may bring a sharp increase in American casualties. The fight to evict the Taliban from its sanctuaries will be bloody. Once the Taliban are evicted, the task of securing communities against roadside and suicide bombs will be tough, as the British know to their cost.

The biggest challenge, however, will be to convince Afghans that progress will be sustained. Two things are critical. There must be many more members of the Afghan National Army on the ground, taking the lead on security issues. In Helmand, there are still far too few ANA in evidence. The US must also make clear that it has the determination to stay the course. Mr Obama says he wants to see visible progress in Afghanistan one year from now. But in all truth, it will take more than a year to turn Afghanistan round.

FINANCIAL TIMES FRIDAY JULY 3 2009

Israel struggles to adapt to a changing picture of Iran

Philip Stephens

No one watches events in Iran more closely than Israel. Tehran has long been the abiding preoccupation, some would say obsession of political discourse in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Now the story line has changed.

At first glance the violent repression deployed by Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad's regime in the wake of last month's presidential election has been grist to the mill. The images of beaten and bloodied demonstrators have described vividly to a global audience Israel's long-held view of the Iranian theocracy. Yet the implications do not all run in the same direction. The apparent fixing of the poll result and the subsequent crushing of dissent has also made the case for more rather than less engagement by the west.

Before one or two of my regular correspondents of a neo-conservative leaning accuse me of going soft on an authoritarian Islamist regime with nuclear ambitions, I should say that this point was made to me this week in Tel Aviv by a shrewd member of the Israeli diplomatic establishment and sometime adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – no friend of the ayatollahs, in other words.

The reaction of western governments to Mr Ahmadi-Nejad's determination to remain in power suggests a different course. The Group of Eight rich nations has issued a strong – by diplomatic standards – denunciation of violence against demonstrators. I am sure I was not alone in seeing a certain irony in Russia's signature on a document affirming individual liberties. That aside, the condemnations of the suppression of peaceful protest – including those of the European Union and the US administration – were surely right in their rejection of Tehran's flimsy efforts to blame the west for the flowering of Iranian democracy.

Mir-Hossein Moussavi, Mr Ahmadi-Nejad's opponent, was not offering the radical departure in Iranian politics that some Republicans in Washington have chosen to imagine. The presidential contest was a power struggle within Iran's revolutionary family.

That said, the popular reaction to the apparent vote-rigging has indeed changed the game. The authority of the regime has suffered irrecoverable damage. Few of those who took to the streets will believe that it was all an American, or even more unlikely, a British plot.

This observation was offered to me by another Israeli, Isaac Herzog, the Labour minister for welfare and social services in the government coalition, recalled the occasions when his famous father visited the Shah's Iran during the 1960s. Chaim Herzog would report back that the Shah was living on borrowed time: the ruler had grown too distant from the ruled.

The same can now be said of the gulf between Mr Ahmadi-Nejad and Iran's youthful middle classes, although, as with the Shah, the end may be some time in coming.

The earlier point made by the Israeli diplomat was that Iran was no longer the country the west had thought, or wanted to think, it was. The post-election scenes on the streets of Iranian cities would surely strengthen those who argued that the way to encourage Iran's return to the international community was through engagement – by embracing the ambitions of the protesters rather than shutting them out along with the regime. No one could pretend that Iran was the monolith that is North Korea.

As for suggestions that Israel is ready to bomb Iran to prevent Mr Ahmadi-Nejad from getting his hands on nuclear weapons, the issue was now more complicated. "How do you bomb Neda?" the diplomat said, in a reference to Neda Salehi Agha-Soltan, the young woman whose death on the streets of Tehran has become a symbol of the regime's repression.

Mr Netanyahu would doubtless dispute this analysis, but the Israeli prime minister's views no longer carry weight. Until my discussions this week with Israeli politicians and scholars from across the political spectrum I had not realised quite how comprehensively he had wrecked his own foreign policy.

Suggestions that Israel is ready to bomb Iran are now more complicated. 'How do you bomb Neda?' said one diplomat

If Mr Netanyahu had started out with a single strategic objective it was to engage Barack's Obama's administration in a joint project to put an end to Iran's nuclear ambitions. As an academic sympathetic to the prime minister's predicament put it, he wanted above all from Washington "a credible policy on Iran".

No matter that no one quite knew what such a policy would have amounted to: focusing on Iran would have allowed the prime minister to put the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the back-burner and sidestep international pressure to accept a two-state solution.

That was the plan. And what has happened? Mr Obama upturned the argument: a deal between Israel and the Palestinians was promoted in Washington as part of the broad regional initiative necessary to deal properly with Iran. Worse, from Mr Netanyahu's perspective, Israeli-US relations have been reduced to an increasingly bitter argument about his refusal to halt settlement building on the West Bank.

As for Iran, the US president has indeed stepped back from immediate engagement. Doubtless he has been influenced by those who argue that restoring relations with Tehran would "legitimise" Mr Ahmadi-Nejad. Much the same argument was heard a few decades ago about détente with the Soviet Union.

But Mr Obama's options remain open, as do those of European leaders. They should listen carefully to the voices in Iran who want the country to join the modern world.

Before visiting Israel I heard a prominent, Tehran-based academic put the case well. The policy of isolating Iran, he said, played into the hands of the regime by allowing it to demonise the US and its allies and forestall, in the name of national security, the opening up of society.

Breaking into this vicious circle will not be easy. It will require from Mr Obama a willingness to expend more political capital in explaining that diplomacy is not a synonym for defeatism. Engagement may well fail to persuade Iran to give up its quest for full mastery of the nuclear cycle – an ambition, incidentally, that the ayatollahs inherited from the Shah. It might just persuade Tehran not to build a bomb. In any event, the alternatives are all worse – unless, of course, Mr Obama feels he should take some foreign policy advice from Mr Netanyahu.

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FINANCIAL TIMES JULY 4/JULY 5 2009

Unfreezing cold war attitudes

Arms cuts alone will not 'reset' US-Russia relations

When Barack Obama meets Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, Russia's ruling duumvirate, in Moscow next week, both sides say they want to "press the reset button" in US-Russian relations. It will not be easy. Bilateral ties between the erstwhile rivals of the cold war reached their nadir last year with the Russian invasion of Georgia and the seemingly inexorable expansion of the Nato alliance. Those tensions persist.

Moscow is bitterly opposed to the installation of US anti-missile defence batteries and radar detection systems in Poland and the Czech Republic. The US sees Russia as unhelpful in seeking to curb the nuclear ambitions of Iran, and positively unfriendly in signing arms deals with other anti-American allies. Moscow's political manipulation of oil and gas supplies is another cause for US suspicion.

Mr Obama has found an excellent excuse for the summit in the need to sign a new nuclear arms pact to replace the strategic arms reduction treaty (Start) that expires in December. It provides a forum in which Russia can be treated as an equal, and thus earn the respect that Mr Putin, in particular, feels his country has been denied by the US since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

If the treaty lapses, there will be no verification process to prevent a new arms race. But the details have yet to be agreed, and Russia wants reassurances on missile defence to be linked to any new treaty. That is a concession the US president is not yet ready to make – not least because it would hugely complicate any ratification process in the US Congress.

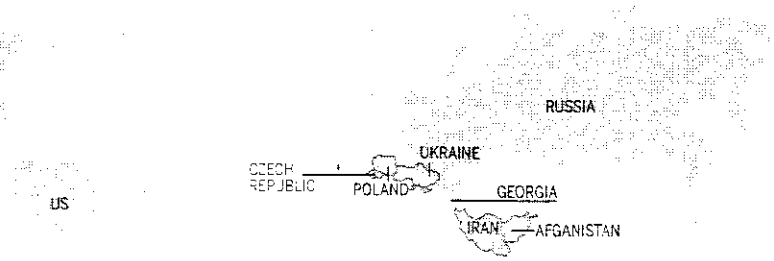
In principle, both are prepared to agree on arms cuts. They have other common interests: in stopping nuclear proliferation to states and non-state actors; in stabilising Afghanistan and preventing the re-emergence of a Taliban regime; and in persuading Iran, in particular, from becoming a nuclear-armed state. If anything, Russia has a greater interest in a stable Iran and Afghanistan than the US does. They are near neighbours. But Moscow wants further concessions in return for its co-operation.

The most important is a recognition that Russia should enjoy a "privileged" sphere of interest in the former Soviet space. That sounds ominously like a *carte blanche* to interfere at will in the internal affairs of independent states, such as Ukraine and Georgia. It is precisely why many people in those countries want to join Nato: they feel threatened by their former imperial master.

The only way to persuade Russia is to engage Russia. Mr Obama's desire to do so is genuine and unsettling enough for the Kremlin. He could go further and offer to build a joint missile defence system, to prove that it is not aimed at Russia. But Mr Putin will be very hard to convince.

Common purpose

Disarmament Today's Obama-Medvedev summit will open the way to renewed talks on nuclear arms control that, though limited in scope, could lead to wider co-operation, write **James Blitz** and **Stefan Wagstyl**



Arms control The issue likely to produce some concrete success. Both countries are working towards a treaty to replace the 1991 Start pact, which expires in December, limiting their nuclear arsenals perhaps to about 1,500 warheads each – down from the current 2,200

Iran Much trickier. Obama wants Russia to take a tougher line on Iran's nuclear programme – in particular, to pledge not to deliver surface-to-air missiles to Tehran. But support is unlikely to be forthcoming

Missile defence shield Medvedev is seeking a firm commitment from Obama to abandon plans to deploy a missile defence shield in Poland and the Czech Republic, which Russia deems a threat to its own security. However, Obama is unlikely to go beyond the current position of saying he is reviewing the plan

Russia's near abroad Medvedev wants greater flexibility to deal with the states of the former Soviet empire, especially Ukraine and Georgia. But, while Obama will reiterate that the US is not pressing for both states to enter Nato any time soon, he will maintain that their independence must be respected

Bilateral relations The two leaders are expected to set up a permanent bilateral relations commission headed by Hillary Clinton, US secretary of state, and Sergei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister. Its agenda would include economic links that could strengthen political ties

Afghanistan Obama is hoping Medvedev will give more assistance with the transfer of goods, including weapons, across Russian territory

Rocky path to the summit US - Russia treaties

	Start I	Start II	Start III	Sort
Date signed	July 31 1991	*	*	May 24 2002
Deployed warhead limit	6,000	3,000-3,500	2,000-2,500	1,700-2,200
Deployed delivery vehicle limit	1,600	-	-	-
Expiry date	Dec 5 2009	-	-	Dec 5 2009

*The second Strategic Arms Reduction treaty, intended to curb the two countries' nuclear arsenals, foundered on diplomatic disagreements and was never activated. Talks on a Start III made little progress but led to the Strategic Offensive Reductions treaty

Source: Arms Control Association

When Barack Obama arrives in Moscow today for his first full-blown summit with Dmitry Medvedev, many will be tempted to cast their minds back to the grand old days of US-Soviet summitry.

In the two decades before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the leaders of the two countries got together for several set-piece occasions, signing agreements bound in heavy leather tomes that paved the way for reductions in their nations' nuclear weapons. Taking a step back to those times, the two presidents will point the way to the first arms control agreement by Washington and Moscow in seven years.

The two-day summit is not just about nuclear weapons. Mr Obama wants to take a new step in his attempt to "press the reset button" on the US-Russia relationship, putting behind him the tensions between the White House and the Kremlin that dominated the final years of George W. Bush's presidency.

Just as he reached out to the Muslim world on his recent visit to Cairo, Mr Obama wants to make a speech tomorrow that makes clear there is more that unites Americans and Russians than divides them. He will also want to gauge what is still the most perplexing feature of the current Kremlin – that although Mr Medvedev is head of state, Vladimir Putin – whom he meets for a short breakfast tomorrow – appears still to be the fount of power.

The drive to reduce nuclear stockpiles is, however, the pre-eminent theme of this summit, the subject where the US and Russian leaderships have a chance to demonstrate a spirit of common purpose. Arms control is one of the few issues in global politics where they know they dominate the agenda. The two hold 95 per cent of the world's nuclear arsenals between them and – in the 1970s and early 1990s – they went a long way to reducing their stockpiles.

Yet this agenda had fallen into abeyance. Rather than cutting nuclear weapons, the emphasis of Mr Bush was on creating a missile defence shield in Europe that could one day protect America. As one western diplomat puts it: "Arms control negotiators have forgotten how to negotiate."

Today, however, marks a sea-change. The US and Russia will reach a joint understanding on plans to sign a replacement for the 1991 Start pact,

95

Percentage of the world's nuclear arsenal held by the US and Russia

7

Years since they last held bilateral talks on arms control

which allows each side to verify the other's nuclear arsenals. They will want to finalise agreement on this before the end of the year, when the pact will have expired. Moreover, they will move towards putting new limits on the number of nuclear warheads they possess, bringing them down from a maximum of 1,700-2,200 agreed in 2002 to around 1,500.

In one sense, this will be no more than symbolic. "The likely warhead reductions are pretty minimalist," says Mark Fitzpatrick from the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "It's very ambitious to come up with an arms treaty within a matter of months. Past ones took years to complete. The negotiators have until December to finalise the agreement."

But Mr Obama is also putting so strong a focus on the issue because it is the easiest platform from which to restart the US-Russia relationship, as he desires. With the cold war and the Soviet Union gone, Russia is desperate to recover some of its past prestige. By entering into bilateral arms negotiations, Moscow feels its rank is recognised. As one Russian diplomat says, the summit is about "status, status, status".

Nonetheless, Mr Obama's aims go well beyond this. In recent months – most notably in his landmark April speech in Prague – he set out the goal of moving to a world that is free of nuclear weapons. Most world leaders will see that as a rhetorical gesture that will never be realised in practice. But underlying that overarching goal is a belief that something must be done under his own presidency to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons around the world.

The fundamental concern Mr Obama has is with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the international agreement that governs what nations can and cannot do with atomic energy. It has been in force since 1970 but is rapidly falling into abeyance. At a review conference next year, the five official nuclear powers – the US, UK, France, China and Russia – want to persuade the rest of the world to tighten up the rules of the NPT regime.

As more and more governments around the world look to harness civilian nuclear power as a source of clean electricity, tighter controls are

½

needed to stop cheats or terrorists from exploiting or stealing some of the proliferation-prone technologies for bomb-building.

The cheats include North Korea, which left the NPT and has exploded a bomb of its own; and Iran, which is in the NPT but is defying United Nations calls to halt its suspect nuclear work. But even some non-nuclear NPT members, who have better records on this issue than Iran, are resisting a tightening of the rules.

To overcome that resistance, the official nuclear powers will need to uphold their side of the NPT bargain. Under the terms of the NPT, they are obliged to work towards abolishing their nuclear weapons in exchange for keeping others from seeking the bomb.

"That is why [today's] agreement is so important," says a European government official. "If we want parties to NPT to agree steps to control proliferation, it's important that the US and Russia show a commitment to reduce their arsenals; and there is a lot of appreciation in the non-aligned world for what the US and Russia are doing."

Joseph Cirincione of the Ploughshares Fund, a nuclear weapons policy foundation, agrees, saying: "Both sides recognise that they don't need these huge cold war arsenals. They also need to demonstrate a commitment to stop new nations or groups acquiring these weapons. That's the fundamental change."

Mr Obama also wants to use today's summit as a springboard to get the US Senate to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This is the step most urgently sought by other nations, because restrictions on nuclear testing will limit any country's ability to produce new types of weapons.

"There was a great sense of achievement when CTBT was signed and great dismay when the US refused to ratify it in 1999," says Mr Fitzpatrick of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. "But Obama has said he will submit it to the Senate for ratification again – and the agreement with Russia creates momentum for that."

Even so, the implications of today's deal can easily be overstated. For one thing, there are limits to how much further Russia will go down the road of reductions in the number of offensive warheads. In Russia as well as the US, there is a consensus among experts that both countries could set a limit of 1,000 each in future negotiations and possibly 500. But the main difficulty is in Russia, whose conventional military capabilities are nowhere near equal to those of the US. Nuclear weapons are therefore deemed to be a kind of strategic equaliser.

Second, Moscow is threatening to tie any agreement on warhead reductions to a commitment by Washington to abandon its plans to install a missile defence shield in Europe. Mr Obama has genuine doubts about the missile defence plan he inherited from the Bush administration, both in terms of its cost and whether it could ever effectively work. But Russia wants him to go much further towards renunciation.

Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the Russian parliament's upper house, says: "We must start moving in all directions simultaneously." The implication is that if Mr Obama fails to give any ground on this issue, Russia could retaliate later this year by refusing to sign the Start I replacement treaty once negotiations are over.

Finally, whatever Russia and the US achieve on nuclear disarmament, they cannot easily rein in the rest of the world. Many countries have already signed the CTBT. But Pakistan will not sign it unless India does the same; and without their approval and that of North Korea the treaty cannot take full effect.

Above all, Iran's nuclear programme threatens to drive Russia and the US apart in the next year. The Iranian regime shows no signs of wanting to cease uranium enrichment, which many states believe is aimed at building a nuclear bomb. The US is therefore looking to Russia to help apply pressure on Tehran, seeking Moscow's support for another round of UN sanctions towards the end of this year.

But Russia remains cautious. Moscow does not want to see Iran developing a nuclear weapon but many experts believe it will also weigh its own interests in the matter, such as gaining access to Iranian oil and gas, dividing up Caspian sea resources and selling arms.

In Moscow today, both leaders will be focused not only on those issues but on the relationship they are seeking to build. There is little doubt they will hail the summit as a success. Yet reality will soon set in. The US and Russia will want the world today to take heed of what they are trying to achieve on the road to nuclear disarmament. But it is a world far more complex than it was in the more comfortable bipolar era.

A tricky moment to renew Trident

If the US and Russia begin to make significant progress in nuclear warhead reductions, how much will this force other powers to disarm? The question is an increasingly live one in the UK, writes James Blitz.

The government agreed in 2007 to build a submarine platform from which it can launch its Trident nuclear missiles. But as Paul Cornish, head of the international security programme at Chatham House, puts it: "If there is a new climate in arms control and non-proliferation emanating from Washington, then this will have implications for the UK's nuclear weapons position."

The foreign office takes the view that Britain is "the most forward-leaning of the existing nuclear weapons states" on disarmament. It notes that the UK cut its operationally available warheads from 300 to below 200 in 1998 and to "fewer than 160" in 2006. Gordon Brown, prime minister, announced this year that the government would cut the number of missiles carried by the submarine fleet. Officials even like to argue that Britain was ahead of President Barack Obama in spelling out a commitment to a world without nukes.

The UK has a presentational difficulty in this debate, however. It is making the strategic decision to replace the four submarines that carry Trident just as the US and Russia are driving forward on nuclear weapons reductions. Britain argues that it is merely renewing an existing capability. But some defence experts believe it should delay building the submarines to see how negotiations develop.

Last month, a committee of MPs acknowledged the problem. "The decision to renew the UK's Trident system is perceived by some foreign states and some among the British public as appearing to contradict the government's declared commitment to strengthening the international nuclear non-proliferation regime," said the foreign affairs select committee. It argued that Britain should explain better the reasons for the Trident renewal decision both nationally and globally. Better explanation is as far as any UK government will go, however. There would have to be a big breakthrough by Washington and Moscow for the UK to disarm altogether.

FINANCIAL TIMES MONDAY JULY 6 2009

Obama reaches limit of friendly tone

Clive Crook

Before the Iranian election, US opinion on Barack Obama's foreign policy divided on predictably partisan lines. Now the picture is more complicated.

Mr Obama's supporters admired his desire to restore US standing in the world and his willingness to talk "without preconditions" to governments his predecessor despised. This would make all the difference, they believed. The new president's conservative and neoconservative critics rolled their eyes. They attacked Mr Obama's naive overtures to dictators, and his unwarranted apologies for supposed US sins.

Those critics see Iran as one more proof they were right. The administration spoke respectfully to Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad, seeking not to humiliate but to reach an accommodation. Mr Obama's speech in Cairo on US-Islamic relations was welcomed in much of the Muslim world and had most US liberals swooning in admiration. And see what happened. The Iranian government has hardened its stance on nuclear materials, persisted with its support for Iraqi insurgents, and stamped on its own people when they challenged a rigged election.

So much for soft power. Mr Obama's friendly outreach to other states – be they hostile, unco-operative or even supposedly friendly – has been no more productive, say the critics. China is about as implacable, North Korea just as deranged, Europe just as feckless. Russia, which Mr Obama visits this week, bullies and bribes its near-abroad with as little finesse as usual. What a surprise: the world is not smiling back.

Iran's stepped-up repression has made the conservative critique harder for Mr Obama's supporters to shrug off. In fact it has split them. Give the new approach more time, some say. Others have just gone quiet. And many are actually echoing the conservatives' charge: vacillation in the face of outrage. Mr Obama is dodging a friendly fire of neocon ideas: this stolen election cannot stand. The president must get on the right side of history. The Middle East is at a turning point: a firm push now and everything changes. All that.

A week ago I argued that Mr Obama was choosing to be weak on domestic policy, deferring too much to Congress and making the mere passage of legislation on energy and healthcare his highest priority, regardless of its defects. So you might expect me to side with those – conservatives and now liberals as well – who are calling the president spineless on foreign policy. I do not. The criticism may stick, and could do Mr Obama real harm: no Democratic president wants to be likened to Jimmy Carter. But it is wrong.

In domestic policy, the administration has the means to achieve its goals, provided it faces the trade-offs honestly and brings public opinion along. If Congress ends up passing no laws or bad laws on climate change and health reform, blame the president. Foreign policy is harder. The gap between ends and means is bigger. As in domestic policy, the administration must do what it can with tools it has. In foreign policy, its tools are few and the aims pressed on the White House are much too ambitious.

How quickly we forget. The debacle in Iraq was a tale of hubris. The US thought it knew far more than it did about the country – about its non-existent weapons of mass destruction, about its internal politics – and believed itself to be much more powerful than it was. Add moral fervour, which was far more justified in Iraq's case than Iran's, deplorable as the Iranian regime may be, and you had a calamity waiting to happen.

The US commands overwhelming military might, but this awesome force is constrained on every side, above all by US opinion. After Iraq, as after Vietnam, the US has lost much of its will to fight.

Should it suffer another attack like that of September 11 2001, or worse, you will see US hard power unleashed again. Mr Obama will be granted a licence to use it; in fact, for good or ill, he will have no choice but to use it. For the moment, though, the US is disinclined to use its hard power, and regimes whose interests are opposed to those of the US know it.

What about soft power? Early on, the Bush administration disdained it. This was a mistake which Mr Obama has corrected. But it was never a question of choosing hard or soft. You use both. The error is to expect too much of either.

Did Mr Obama expect too much of soft power, or ever say hard power was outmoded? That would be worthy of criticism – but he did not. He never said a friendly smile would change everything. Nor has he shrunk from using hard power, as far as US opinion will allow. The current withdrawal from Iraq is only a withdrawal from the cities: tens of thousands of US troops are staying. And the president is fighting a more vigorous war in Afghanistan, with thousands more troops to back up a "surge".

In foreign policy, Mr Obama is muddling through. He can do no more. He never exaggerated the transformational power of a handshake. His supporters did, to be sure, and he did not go out of his way to disabuse them. But the oddest thing, after Iran, is where some of those supporters have ended up. They stupidly believed that the president's face was all it would take to change the world. Suddenly they want him to be less like Barack Obama and more like George W. Bush.

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FINANCIAL TIMES TUESDAY JULY 7 2009

Obama must be firm on foreign policy

Gideon Rachman

An opinion poll released last week revealed some heartening news for the US. President Barack Obama is the most popular political figure in the world. The least trusted leaders, according to a poll of 20 countries conducted by *worldpublicopinion.org*, are President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad of Iran and Vladimir Putin, the Russian prime minister. When Mr Obama has breakfast with Mr Putin in Moscow today, it will be a meeting between the world's romantic hero and one of its pantomime villains.

But charm and good looks can only get you so far in geopolitics. Mr Obama's charismatic aura is obscuring an uncomfortable truth. His foreign policy is in crisis.

The arms-control agreement signed yesterday between the US and Russia will give the president some badly-needed positive news to bring back from Moscow. But beneath the smiley surface, relations between Russia and the US remain tense and suspicious.

Just a few months into his presidency, Mr Obama's policy of engagement with Iran has also been all but wrecked by the violent crackdown in that country. His advisers once day-dreamed about a dramatic presidential trip to Tehran, a speech before cheering students, a disarming smile for Mr Ahmadi-Nejad. All of that is unthinkable now. Instead, Mr Obama is left having to cope with a wounded and aggressive Iranian government, intent on pressing ahead with its nuclear programme. The US president will now have to fend off the "bomb Iran" lobby – but without being able to point to a plausible diplomatic alternative.

The policy of American engagement with Russia is going only a little better. Agreements on arms control and transit routes to Afghanistan cannot extinguish the still smouldering antagonisms created by last year's Georgia war.

Above all Mr Obama is getting nothing on the issue he placed at the centre of his drive for a rapprochement with Russia: Iran.

Mr Obama's problems with Iran and Russia are merging into a single, nasty mess. The president had seen an improved relationship with Russia as the key to solving Iran. The idea was that the newly friendly Russians would help to talk their Iranian neighbours into a nuclear deal. If that did not work, Russia would help to tighten sanctions on Iran. Without the Kremlin there can be no new United Nations sanctions on Iran (that pesky Russian veto). A package of western sanctions that does not include Russia would be too full of holes to put real pressure on Iran.

But Russia looks very unlikely to co-operate with the US on sanctions. So both the Iranian and Russian problems are getting worse.

The impasse over Iran points to a broader problem in the Obama approach to Russia. The new administration reckoned that President George W. Bush had got sucked into an unnecessarily antagonistic relationship with the Kremlin. Mr Obama wanted to play down arguments over Georgia and missile defence, and instead engage Russia on more important strategic questions where the countries have shared interests: arms control, Iran, terrorism, Afghanistan, the world economy, climate change. Once the Americans and Russians got used to co-operating on these big issues, they could return to the difficult problems in a calmer atmosphere.

The trouble is that while Mr Obama wants US-Russian relations to be about the creation of "win-win" situations, the Russians are treating the relationship more like an arm-wrestling match. They seem intent on exploring whether America's efforts to get past the dispute over Georgia mean that the US is now prepared to grant them their longed-for "sphere of influence" in the former Soviet Union. The US has had to push back – creating continuing tensions over Georgia, Ukraine and missile defence.

The Americans think they have detected a genuine split in Russia between relative liberals around President Dmitry Medvedev and a more thuggish group around Mr Putin. Mr Obama has almost said as much. But even if the split exists, it is not much help – for it seems that the Putinites are in the ascendancy. One sign of this was Russia's recent decision to abandon its pursuit of membership of the World Trade Organisation.

The result is that the US government's efforts to press the reset button have not really succeeded in rebooting US-Russian relations. Despite yesterday's deal, they are still angry and dominated by mutual suspicion.

This presents both a foreign policy and a domestic political problem for Mr Obama. He is not making progress on Iran, and the clock is ticking. Fresh problems in Russia's "near abroad" could blow up at any moment. And at home, conservatives are itching to paint him as a "second Jimmy Carter" – weak, naive and pushed around by foreigners.

Faced with this critique, the president will be under pressure to prove that he can be tough. But that can be a dangerous trap for a young, liberal president: similar pressures led John F. Kennedy to take the first steps into Vietnam and President Carter to launch the disastrous effort to rescue the American hostages in Iran.

The Bush administration tested to destruction the idea that American foreign policy should be based on confronting "evil". So this is indeed a moment for Mr Obama to be tough on foreign policy. He needs to be tough enough not to be panicked into macho gestures by the setbacks he has suffered in Russia and Iran.

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FINANCIAL TIMES WEDNESDAY JULY 8 2009

Moscow is wary of Obama's charms

Both sides need to rebuild relations on common interests

The first formal US-Russia summit between Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev was never expected to sign off on new deals of great substance. Even the easiest issue – agreeing on a new round of nuclear arms cuts – will still take months of careful negotiation to pin down. It could yet be derailed by disagreement over the building of a US ballistic missile defence system. But this week's meetings in Moscow will have succeeded if they change the tone of mutual recrimination in a vital bilateral relationship.

The commitment of both sides to reduce their nuclear warheads and launch vehicles by a third in a new treaty is very welcome. Perhaps they could have been more ambitious, but it should lay the foundation for further progress.

Both sides also agreed to intensify their co-operation to prevent nuclear weapons proliferation and nuclear terrorism. Russia will allow transit of military as well as non-military supplies to US and Nato forces in Afghanistan. These are positive gestures in areas where they have a clear common interest. They can and should be the building blocks for the restoration of trust between the two old cold war rivals.

Missile defence is one difficult issue that they set to one side. Another is Nato enlargement. On both subjects Mr Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, his predecessor and mentor, are convinced that US action is anti-Russian. They will not change their views until trust returns to the relationship.

Mr Obama sought to tackle that question in his one set-piece speech. "America wants a strong, peaceful and prosperous Russia," he insisted. Many Russians, including Mr Putin and Mr Medvedev, clearly remain unconvinced.

The US president did not pull his punches. All states have the right to choose their leaders, enjoy secure borders and pursue their own foreign policies, he said – including Georgia and Ukraine. He also drew a distinction between governments "which serve their own people" and those "which serve only their own power". The former survive, the latter do not. It was a clear reference to Mr Putin's authoritarian drift.

Mr Obama's words were, as ever, finely judged and persuasive. But they did not attract the sort of spontaneous applause from his audience that he won in Cairo and Prague. Nor were they broadcast live on any of the main state-run TV channels. Even if the tone has changed from the past, it may take another generation in Moscow to want to hear it.

FINANCIAL TIMES THURSDAY JULY 9 2009

G8 must galvanise talks on warming

But China and India have a responsibility to engage

The summit meeting of the Group of Eight industrialised nations that opened in Italy yesterday looks increasingly like an event in search of a purpose. The more broadly based G20, including China and India among others, is the place where deals on the global economy are being done. So what is the point of the G8?

The answer should be: to galvanise the debate on climate change. A consensus is needed between the rich and poor for a new deal to slow down global warming. It is supposed to be finalised by the United Nations at Copenhagen in December. But to have any hope of progress there, the leaders gathered in L'Aquila this week must give a clear sense of direction.

The European Union has been consistently in the lead in setting ambitious targets to cut emissions. The good news now is that the US president is engaged and enthusiastic. Barack Obama will co-chair today's meeting of the 17-member Major Economies Forum, including both China and India. The bad news is that Hu Jintao, the Chinese president, has gone home to deal with the ethnic unrest in Xinjiang. But that should not give an excuse for indecision.

The first ominous sign is that the two sides have not agreed on a target of halving global emissions by 2050. That is the minimum necessary to ensure that the rise in global temperatures should not exceed 2 degrees Celsius, the danger level agreed by scientists. It would require the developed economies to cut their emissions by 80 per cent, to allow developing economies to pollute more as they grow faster. But China is not prepared to sign up to the target until there are more concessions on the table. It is hard to understand, as China stands to be a big beneficiary.

India is also playing hard to get. Delhi will not move on a complete package until there is more money on the table, with rich countries paying the poor to mitigate the effects of global warming, and adapt to them. Such an attitude could scupper any deal.

The G8 leaders can and should do more. In particular, they should start work on a commercial mechanism via the cap-and-trade system to finance bigger transfers from rich to poor. That would be politically more acceptable than straight handouts. The EU might also unilaterally increase its target to cut emissions in 2020 from 20 to 30 per cent. Both the US and Japan need to set more ambitious targets for 2020 as well as 2050. But in the end, a deal on climate change is not just for the rich to do. The poor will suffer most if it fails.

FINANCIAL TIMES FRIDAY JULY 10 2009

An opportunity for Indonesia to shine

Yudhoyono must use his victory to accelerate reforms

A resounding victory for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the incumbent president of Indonesia, seems certain to be confirmed when official results of this week's election are announced. Normally reliable polls suggest he won more than 60 per cent of the vote.

The landslide should give the former general-turned-democrat, known by his initials SBY, a real opportunity to transform the world's most populous Muslim majority nation from being an also-ran in Asia to becoming an economic leader with a much louder voice in the region.

That remains a considerable challenge, as the modest reform achievements of Mr Yudhoyono's first five years in office would suggest. For a start, he must clean up a creaking bureaucracy where bribery is endemic. The judiciary has to be overhauled. The existence of deep-rooted corruption is a big brake on essential investment.

Spending is needed above all on infrastructure, with constant power failures disrupting electricity supplies and dilapidated ports in the vast archipelago obstructing both exports and internal market supplies. Health services and education are also in urgent need of improvement with a fast-growing youthful population. Economic growth needs to accelerate sharply to provide jobs for the expanding labour force.

All these things Mr Yudhoyono has promised, and it helped him get re-elected. He has a much stronger political position, with his own Democrat party having won 26 per cent of the seats in the new parliament, compared with just 10 per cent five years ago. He will be less reliant on political partners and has said he will appoint a more technocratic government. He has a clean image and is seen as serious in trying to tackle corruption. Now he needs to deliver.

The elections marked the eclipse of heirs to both of Indonesia's former dictators. Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of Sukarno, the revered first president of the country, came a distant second. Jusuf Kalla, at the head of Golkar, the ruling party under Suharto, the last military strong man, was a poor third.

Yet the old elite that rose to the top under military rule – including Mr Yudhoyono himself – remains dominant. Indonesia needs a new generation of leaders to emerge, as much as economic and institutional reform. Perhaps the greatest test of SBY's second and final term in office will be his success in enabling that to happen. The last thing Indonesians need is the creation of a new dynasty.

FINANCIAL TIMES JULY 11/JULY 12 2009

Food security is G8 chance of relevance

Leaders must now face down domestic vested interests

The Group of Eight summit is deservedly derided as a glorified but vacuous photo opportunity. But the world leaders gathered in L'Aquila will redeem much if they make good on the food security initiative announced yesterday.

The boom made it easy to overlook that not all was well with the economy's most basic function: keeping people fed. The world's poor, already smarting from record food prices, now have to contend with the recession's devastating effect on incomes. This year, there will for the first time be more than 1bn chronically hungry people.

It does not have to be this way. The world is rich enough and humanity sufficiently inventive to secure food for everyone. The problem of hunger has long since been solved in large parts of the world. But elsewhere it remains a monument to failures of policy and leadership – above all the misguided preference for in-kind food aid over productivity.

Oxfam, a charity, finds the G8 has cut aid for agricultural development to just a quarter of the $20bn a year it spent in the 1980s. The food aid that replaces it perpetuates the problem it is supposed to solve, destroying incentives for farmers in the countries that receive it – making them even more dependent on continued aid. Meanwhile farm, transport and development lobbies in donor countries, especially the US, are not keen to lose their subsidies.

This must end. The G8's commitment of $20bn over three years to a food security fund is a step in the right direction. This amount can do a lot of good, if it is well spent, which requires sustained political will. Donors must not use it to repackage existing commitments, and recipients must not be allowed to dress up long-fancied projects as suddenly related to agriculture.

The best use of the fund would be to support agronomy research and education in poor countries. Such knowledge is an international public good; public or charity support made possible the "green revolution" in Asia and similar boosts in farm productivity in the now-rich world. Greater climatic variety means funding is even more important in Africa.

But research and capital investment will disappoint as long as global food markets remain distorted. Richer countries must eschew bilateral barter deals and end their shameful agricultural subsidies – especially those taking the form of in-kind food aid. While aid cannot be stopped while people's lives depend on it, it should be shifted into cash so recipients can buy food from the sources they see fit – including local production.

The US and Japan deserve credit for raising the issue. But the G8's lacklustre record of keeping promises makes it too soon to cheer. To justify their grandstanding abroad, leaders must now take the battle to interest groups at home.

A war that cannot be fought on the cheap

Philip Stephens

The west has about a year – at the outside two – to show that it has a coherent strategy for the war in Afghanistan. Gordon Brown's government has a still more pressing obligation to provide Britain's armed forces with the resources necessary to play their part.

This is not a war that, in the conventional meaning of the word, can be "won". A big part of the strategic shift needed in coming months is to redefine in the minds of western voters what might eventually be claimed as victory. Sadly, there is less ambiguity about what would constitute defeat.

The deaths of 15 British soldiers in Helmand province during the first 10 days of this month has put Afghanistan back on Britain's domestic political agenda. The rising toll – with losses standing at 184, more Britons have now been killed in Afghanistan than in Iraq – has not yet turned the country decisively against the war. It has exposed a dangerous divide between ministers and military commanders.

The latest poll, published in the Guardian, shows national opinion evenly divided. Support for the troops in the field weighs against doubts about the endeavour. That is better than could be expected given the rising trend of casualties. But public support will not long survive the growing perception that the politicians lack a strategy and the armed forces are under-equipped.

Earlier this year, the prime minister refused a request from army chiefs for an additional 2,000 troops to support the 8,000 or so already in Afghanistan. Ministers allowed only a smaller temporary reinforcement ahead of next month's elections.

Mr Brown's decision, driven by Treasury antipathy to defence spending in general and wars in particular, and influenced perhaps by his own lack of empathy for the armed forces, should not be blamed for the recent losses. By and large, the casualties reflect the fact that the army has gone on the offensive. Taking the fight to the Taliban was always going to carry a grim price.

Worth saying also is that the supposed outrage of David Cameron's Conservatives smacks of cynical opportunism. Liam Fox, the shadow defence secretary, demands that the army be given all the troops and the helicopters it needs. Yet the Tory Treasury team insists that defence is not exempt from the swingeing cuts it wants in public spending. For good measure, Mr Cameron's aides hint that Mr Fox will be found a different role in a future Tory government.

The goal now is not a shiny new democracy, but a self-sustaining Afghan state able to deny safe havens to al-Qaeda

That said, Mr Brown's rejection of the army's request was a crass misjudgment. So too has been the government's consistent refusal to provide enough helicopters to reduce the casualties inflicted by roadside bombs. This is not a war in which bean-counters can be permitted to second-guess military commanders.

The recent surge in US troops in southern Afghanistan has given the British an opportunity to do what they have always planned but never achieved: to provide security for the local population that is sufficient to detach them from the Taliban.

The hope must be that Mr Brown has now learnt his lesson. He should see the provision of additional troops and equipment on the ground not as a climb-down but as the act of a politician courageous enough to change his mind.

For all that, a change in British tactics will of itself have a negligible impact on the strategic conduct of the campaign. Much as British forces provide the second-largest contingent of the multilateral force, the strategy is set in Washington.

Some of the news is good. Barack Obama's administration has given Afghanistan the attention and resources denied it by its predecessor. It has grasped the connections – political, economic and military within Afghanistan and the relationships with neighbours beyond – integral to a serious plan. It has narrowed the mission's ambition.

Pakistan has at last become a serious focus of attention: so, too, sotto voce, has the link between Islamist extremism in that country and the conflict with India over Kashmir. Mr Obama has appointed high-calibre personnel – political, military and diplomatic – to take charge of the war. The administration has raised troop levels while recognising the limitations of military action.

All this is to be applauded. That is not to say recognition in Washington of these neglected truths will be enough. One of the purposes of the present operation in Helmand is to provide security for the elections. I have yet to find a western politician, British, American or European, ready to voice faith in the leadership of Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president and likely winner of next month's vote.

It may be that the best that the US and its allies can hope for is that by denying victory to the Taliban, it can force more moderate elements to the negotiating table. The goal now is not a shiny new democracy, but a self-sustaining Afghan state that is both willing and able to deny safe havens to al-Qaeda. All the while, however, the west must strive to avoid defeat; and Britain must better serve its brave soldiers.

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INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE
WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2009

In praise of caution

Paul Kennedy

Oh Dear! In the midst of the unfolding crisis in Iran, a country possibly on the brink of a horrible civil war, President Obama is being attacked for being too "timid and passive" in not speaking out against Tehran's forceful repression of opposition protests.

Should not America, the recognized (and often self-proclaimed) leader of the Free World, be the first to castigate what is going on in Iran, where opposition politicians are being arrested, public protests suppressed by violence, and foreign reporters hustled out of the country? Why so cautious? Why the indecision by the Land of the Free, America?

Even Obama's reportedly stronger language at his press conference on June 23 is, on careful reading of the text, a model of circumspection. Pretty soon we may expect to see the dreaded word "appeasement."

Well, hold on a minute. There are two reasons — really, two levels of reasons — why the White House's canny attitude makes sense here.

The first is practical: What, specifically, could America do that would help rather than disturb the situation in Iraq? The answer is: nothing. As Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut has wisely pointed out, the worst thing Washington could do is allow the frazzled Iranian authorities the chance to claim that this is a U.S.-led opposition, with U.S.-led demonstrations.

Americans with any sense of their own history should get the point. When the Civil War broke out, various Europeans spoke of giving support to the North, or intervening on behalf of the South. Such ideas were fantasies. Back then, Americans were determined to settle their own affairs, and nowadays Iranians will settle theirs, even if it takes a year or two, or a decade. Meddling and muddling in Persian waters by Uncle Sam doesn't make sense.

That brings us to our larger point. In spite of its own many problems, America has massive reserve capacities to intervene in most parts of the globe. It has had so since around 1917, when it overtook Europe as the central power in world politics. In that year, it intervened, decisively, in World War I; and came back again, even more decisively, in World War II.

But after 1945, its grand strategy changed in an interesting and fundamental way. Instead of being the last Great Power to join a fight (and thus coming in fresh and strong), it assumed the opposite role: It would place its forces in the front line, along the newly expanded borders of insecurity — Berlin, the Mediterranean, Korea, Southeast Asia. As the British and French withdrew, the American cohorts advanced.

As if in conformity with the law of averages, some of these advances made sense (the Truman Doctrine, the creation of NATO, the Korean intervention), and others were foolish (Vietnam, Iran, Central America). But another consequence was that, over time, Americans and non-Americans alike came to expect that if an international crisis arose Washington was the place where the chief decisions would be made, where the buck stopped.

The idea that there were places in the world in which the U.S. was not strategically interested became incomprehensible. The notion that an American president should observe political convulsions unfolding somewhere and not offer an opinion or propose a decisive policy gradually became unimaginable. America's bitterest foes as well as its most fervent patriots — an odd combination, for sure — took it for granted that America should be up there, out in front.

This belief that the United States should always lead the global cavalry charge into interventions in far-off places is both delusional and a recipe for disaster. It rests upon a constant assumption of worst-case scenarios — Iran nukes Israel, North Korea nukes Japan, the Taliban blow up Yankee Stadium. It is impossible to organize civil society permanently around impending-disaster hypotheses; we are not in the midst of the Battle of Britain, with Nazi barges being assembled on the other side of the English Channel.

We are, though, in a world that contains a small number of unstable regimes, and the United States would, of course, be wise to keep its powder dry and monitoring and response capacities high. There is no sign, however, despite the assertions of the Cheneyites, that the Obama administration is failing to understand that.

But there also seems to be no understanding among such critics that there are other players on the field, that is, significant third parties that are more directly affected than America by the unpleasant or bizarre actions of rogue states. If, for example, Vladimir Putin's Russia is silly enough to try to blackmail its Western neighbors over energy supplies next winter, then the European Union should handle the problem. If Pakistan's situation worsens, is that not of greater concern to India, Russia, China, Saudi Arabia and other nearby countries? If North Korea implodes, then surely the country most directly affected — other than South Korea — is China? Why should America be the first to speak, the first to act, the first to feel compelled to respond?

During the 1870s and 1880s, repeated convulsions and local wars occurred across the Balkans, causing Russia to threaten intervention, and Austria counter-intervention. But everyone needed to know what the great German chancellor Bismarck would do. His policy, very wisely, was to keep his mouth shut, since that made other governments uncertain — and more cautious themselves. He also authorized further enhancements of the Prussian Army. It was a combination — international constraint, plus quiet power improvements — that worked.

Perhaps such Bismarckian restraint is impossible in today's America, where excited talk-show hosts and irresponsible congressmen yelp for action, causing White House advisers to urge the president to be more firm, more pronounced and more decisive.

But right now is not the time for Mr. Obama to be "more decisive" on Iran, because there is nothing for Americans to decide. It is a time, rather, for him to recall a policy of one of his greatest predecessors in office, Theodore Roosevelt: Speak softly, but carry a big stick.

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TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE FRIDAY, JULY 3, 2009

REVIVING U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS

President Obama's attempt to deploy diplomatic power deserves support.

The Obama administration's decision to send a U.S. ambassador to Syria after an absence of four years rectifies an obvious vacancy. But the potential value of this gesture goes well beyond a circumscribed revival of U.S.-Syrian diplomatic relations. This is one of several shrewd moves President Obama has initiated in the larger Middle East.

The administration carefully prepared its June 23 announcement that a U.S. ambassador, yet to be named, would be returning to Syria. This delicate process telegraphed some of Obama's aims in offering Syrian President Bashar Assad the possibility of a transformed relationship with America.

A visit to Damascus by top U.S. military commanders was centered on getting Syria to prevent foreign fighters from crossing into Iraq from Syria. With U.S. combat forces withdrawn from Iraqi cities, cooperation in this area has become indispensable. Both sides now share an interest in avoiding a flare-up of sectarian warfare in Iraq.

Trips to Syria by Jeffrey Feltman, acting assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs, and Daniel Shapiro, the top National Security Council officer for the Mideast, were to explore the chances for understandings on several issues. Among these are negotiations toward a peace treaty between Syria and Israel; Syrian help in reconciling the two main Palestinian factions; a Syrian commitment to respect Lebanese independence; and, perhaps most important of all, the prospects that a Syria at peace with Israel and reintegrated into the Arab fold would abandon its tactical alliance with Iran.

Syria signaled that it was responding positively to at least some of those inquiries in mid-June when former senator George Mitchell, Mr. Obama's special envoy for the Mideast, met with Mr. Assad in Damascus.

If Mr. Assad does agree to drop his alliance with Iran in exchange for regaining the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and receiving Western trade and investment, the Mideast chessboard could be reconfigured in favor of rationality.

The region's tragic propensities may defeat Mr. Obama's strategic vision. But his attempt to deploy diplomatic smart power deserves support.

BOSTON GLOBE

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE
SATURDAY-SUNDAY, JULY 4-5, 2009

AFTER THE CRACKDOWN

The West must engage Iran in a way that gives hope to the opposition and reinforces the doubts of political elites.

Tragically, Iran's government appears to have driven back the most significant challenge to its repressive rule since the 1979 revolution.

First, the hard-line mullahs brazenly stole the election for the hard-line president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. When hundreds of thousands of Iranians protested, they sent their thugs to beat and shoot them. At least 20 people are dead, and hundreds of journalists, political activists and former government officials have been detained.

Even before the elections, Iranians — likely the majority — were fed up with Mr. Ahmadinejad. They were sick of the corruption and incompetence. They wanted more say in how they are governed and more engagement with the world, including the United States. The regime's refusal to listen has now exposed deep fault lines in Iranian society. Even some members of the clerical elite seemed to question the thuggery.

Predictably, Mr. Ahmadinejad and his backers were eager to blame others, especially the United States. President Obama rightly has worked hard not to play into that. There is no sign that the government in Tehran is close to toppling. The opposition has not asked for outside help. They know any direct American involvement would discredit them and strengthen the regime.

The difficult challenge now for the United States and other major powers is to come up with policies that give hope to the opposition and reinforce the doubts of Iran's political elites — without provoking a backlash. The European Union is debating whether to withdraw all of its 27 ambassadors from Tehran to protest the detention of two Iranian employees of the British Embassy. We don't believe in permanent isolation, but that kind of unified action would send an important message.

When they meet in Italy next week, leaders of the Group of 8 leading industrial nations should issue their own clear statement that Iran has violated international norms with its bogus election and repression.

There are other approaches worth exploring. Europe and the United States should look for ways to expand contacts with Iranian academics, artists and other members of civil society and with more moderate Iranian mullahs.

The fact that Mr. Obama has offered a new relationship with Iran's rulers could make it harder for the government to discredit such contacts. After a decent interval, the White House should take a serious look at the idea of opening an "interests section" in Tehran to allow direct contact with the Iranian people. If the government rejects the offer, it would only highlight its own insecurity.

There is no question that the events of the last few weeks have complicated Mr. Obama's offer to negotiate with Iran. Mr. Obama's critics are already charging that talks will legitimize Tehran's rulers and reward them for their abuses. But the United States and its allies deal with unelected and unsavory leaders all the time.

And there are too many important issues to talk about. Tehran's nuclear program is advancing relentlessly. The United States also has a strong interest in trying to enlist Tehran's help in stabilizing Afghanistan and restraining Iran's meddling and worse in Iraq.

Mr. Obama has offered improved relations based on respect. But he also warned there will be heavy costs for Iran if it doesn't abandon its nuclear ambitions. Our concern has always been that Europe, Russia and China would not follow through with tougher sanctions if Iran made the wrong choice. The events of the last few weeks are a reminder of why that line must be held.

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE MONDAY, JULY 6, 2009

MR. OBAMA AND MR. MEDVEDEV

The U.S. president must enlist Russia's support on international issues without endorsing its anti-democratic behavior.

By the time President George W. Bush left office, Russian-American relations had deteriorated alarmingly. Russia bore a good part of the blame, harassing opponents, stifling a free press and bullying its neighbors. But Mr. Bush both enabled former President Vladimir Putin's worst impulses and ignored his occasionally legitimate complaints.

With President Obama scheduled to meet President Dmitri Medvedev of Russia in Moscow on Monday, both sides say they are eager to "reset" the relationship. One welcome sign: Officials said on Friday that Russia had agreed to let American planes fly over Russian territory to resupply forces fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

There are certainly a lot of other difficult issues that need their joint attention.

We are especially eager to see them make progress on reducing their nuclear arsenals — Mr. Bush disdained arms-control negotiations and treaties. Two decades after the fall of Communism, the two countries — astonishingly and frighteningly — still have more than 20,000 nuclear weapons.

In five months, the 1991 Start I treaty — which contains the basic rules for verifying the size and location of each other's nuclear forces — expires. It must be extended. We, along with the rest of the world, are also eager to see the two leaders commit to further reductions in the number of deployed weapons.

Under the 2002 Moscow treaty — Mr. Bush's only arms-reduction treaty — the two sides agreed to go down to between 1,700 and 2,200 deployed warheads. There is talk that they are now looking to reduce that ceiling to 1,500 warheads.

We think 1,000 would send an even clearer message to Iran and North Korea — and others who have been far too tolerant of their nuclear misbehaviors — that the world's two main nuclear powers are placing a lot less value on their nuclear weapons.

Instead of waiting for a treaty, both sides could demonstrate their good will right now, and make the world a lot safer, by jointly committing to taking their entire arsenals off hair-trigger alert. And they should pledge to quickly destroy all of their short-range weapons. The United States has 200 to 300; Russia has at least 3,000. These weapons are not covered by any treaty, and they are too vulnerable to theft.

The two leaders should not let their disagreements over American plans (left over from Mr. Bush) to build a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic stand in the way of an agreement.

We are skeptical that the technology is anywhere near ready for prime time. We are also certain that the system, which Mr. Obama says is intended to stop Iranian missiles, poses no threat to Russian security. A healthy dialogue is clearly in order.

Russia was pivotal in winning recent approval of tougher United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea. But it has been less helpful with Iran. Moscow has strong economic ties with Tehran. But Mr. Obama must do all he can to persuade Mr. Medvedev that he is playing with fire.

The biggest challenge for Mr. Obama will be finding a balance between enlisting Russia's support on international issues without appearing to endorse its anti-democratic behavior at home or its ongoing threats to neighbors, most notably Georgia. Mr. Bush never managed that. Mr. Obama needs to do better.

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2009

BRINGING LIFE TO THE G-8

If this gathering of the Group of 8 is to justify the time and effort, President Obama will have to lead the way.

Expectations are low for this year's Group of 8 summit meeting. That is not for any lack of urgent problems — like a faltering global economy, Iran's unchecked nuclear appetites, global warming or unkept promises to help the world's poorest nations.

But inexcusably lax planning by the host government, Italy, and the political weakness of many of the leaders attending, leave little room for optimism. If this session is going to justify the time and effort, President Obama will have to lead the way. It is time for him to turn the diplomatic credit he has been earning over the past six months into diplomatic capital.

He will need to begin leveraging his more nuanced approach toward Iran to build the kind of unity against nuclear adventurism that predictably eluded George W. Bush. Mr. Obama's offer to engage with Tehran is welcome, but still only half a policy. It needs to be reinforced with firm commitments by the other G-8 economies, Russia included, to apply tough and meaningful sanctions if Iran refuses to constrain its nuclear appetites.

If there is one issue on which the United States lags behind the Europeans, it is climate change. There is general agreement on long-term emissions targets, but Europe is rightly urging swifter and larger emissions reductions by 2020. Mr. Obama would do well to listen and push Congress toward more adventurous short-term reductions when he returns home.

The recession has hit the world's poorest countries hardest. Fortunately, many rich nations, despite their own economic troubles, increased aid commitments last year. Mr. Obama promised to double the United States' aid budget by 2015. But aid from G-8 countries is still $25 billion short of the $105 billion a year they committed to by next year, measured in 2009 dollars. This week's summit should pledge to meet that goal — and each country should announce a specific contribution for this year and next.

Traditionally, the host sets the tone, theme and agenda for these gatherings. But Italy's prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, has directed most of his political energies in recent weeks to try to fend off newspaper charges that he patronized paid female escorts and entertained minimally clad under-age women.

Other attendees have been less colorful, but not much more helpful. Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, has dragged her feet on applying badly needed stimulus to Europe's largest economy. Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Britain, who helped rally support for African development at the 2005 summit hosted by his predecessor, Tony Blair, has stumbled badly since taking over and is keeping a low profile. Taro Aso, Japan's prime minister, is equally unpopular at home and afflicted by a particularly narrow nationalist worldview, even by parochial Japanese standards.

Canada's prime minister, Stephen Harper, leads a weak minority government. President Dmitri Medvedev of Russia labors under the shadow of his mentor and prime minister, Vladimir Putin — no believer in international cooperation. France's president, Nicolas Sarkozy, is politically dominant at home but, more than two years into his tenure, seems to have no coherent international agenda.

Every nation represented at L'Aquila has a clear interest in a stronger and faster economic recovery, stopping Iran from building nuclear weapons, slowing global warming and helping the world's poorest nations prosper. It is up to Mr. Obama to remind and energize them.

G-8 leaders set deadline for Iran on nuclear work

L'AQUILA, ITALY

Tehran told to negotiate by September over its effort to enrich uranium

BY PETER BAKER

The world's major industrial nations have given Iran until September to negotiate the dispute over its nuclear program, but remain vague and divided over what consequences they might try to impose should Tehran continue to defy them.

After a long discussion Wednesday night, President Barack Obama and his counterparts from the rest of the Group of 8 powers called on Iran to compromise on its uranium enrichment program, condemned its crackdown on dissent following President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election and repudiated his statements denying the Holocaust.

But the Russians succeeded at blocking any further sanctions despite Mr. Obama's visit to Moscow leading up to the G-8 summit meeting, which he used to press the Kremlin to join him in a unified front. Although President Dmitri A. Medvedev told Mr. Obama on Monday that he shared concerns about Iran's nuclear program, Russian officials boasted Thursday that they had watered down the G-8 statement.

American officials pronounced themselves pleased by the final result. "It's a strong statement and it reflects a real sense of urgency on the part of all of us, and that includes Britain, France, everybody else who was at the table," said William J. Burns, the under secretary of state for political affairs.

The Obama administration took heart specifically from the assertion that the major powers would use a United Nations meeting in September "to take stock of the situation," effectively setting a deadline of sorts for Iran.

"It's reflective of impatience with Iran," said Denis McDonough, the president's deputy national security adviser. "It does say that Iran needs to fulfill its international responsibilities without further delay."

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France told reporters late Wednesday that the major powers would give Iran until September but "then we will have to make decisions."

Iran has made considerable progress in enriching uranium, and while it insists it is developing the technology strictly for civilian uses, the United States, Europe and other nations accuse it of working toward a weapons program. Iran has defied multiple United Nations resolutions calling on it to suspend its program.

Aside from calling for a "diplomatic

IRAN, PAGE 8

G-8 leaders give Iran deadline for talks

IRAN, FROM PAGE 1

solution" to the nuclear dispute, the G-8 leaders also pressed Tehran for a peaceful resolution to the standoff over the disputed June 12 presidential elections that drew hundreds of thousands into the streets and resulted in thousands of arrests and some deaths when police and pro-government militias responded. But they did not question the legitimacy of the election results.

"We reiterate our full respect for the sovereignty of Iran," the leaders' statement said. "At the same time, we deplore post-electoral violence, which led to the loss of lives of Iranian civilians. Interference with media, unjustified detentions of journalists and recent arrests of foreign nationals are unacceptable."

It went on to insist that "embassies must be permitted to exercise their functions," a reference to Iran's arrest of nine Iranian employees of the British mission in Tehran, eight of whom have been released. Mr. Sarkozy separately demanded that Iran release a 23-year-old French lecturer arrested after taking pictures of demonstrations with her cellular telephone.

Russia's resistance to further sanctions mirrored its actions at last year's G-8 meeting when it likewise blocked any punitive action against Zimbabwe following that nation's violent response to election protests. Mr. Obama hoped to use his visit to Moscow to win greater help from Russia against Iran, but the continuing disagreement illustrated the difficulty in forging a new partnership between Washington and Moscow.

Trade deal sought for 2010

Leaders of rich and developing nations want to finish a long-delayed world trade deal in 2010 and head off trade wars that could hit world economies as they struggle to emerge from the recession, according to a draft of a joint declaration obtained by The Associated Press.

Completing the so-called Doha round of talks has climbed up the agenda because of fears that the economic crisis will lead to an upsurge in protectionist policies like the ones that helped cause the Great Depression of the 1930s.

"We reaffirm our commitment to maintain and promote open markets and reject all protectionist measures in trade and investment," according to a draft of the joint statement signed by 17 nations, including the Group of 8 industrialized countries and five key emerging market economies.

The global trade talks, which were initially to conclude in 2004, have been beset by difficulties and at a standstill for months. A deal would cut goods tariffs and subsidies around the world.

The leaders asked trade ministers to meet prior to the Group of 20 meeting of developing and rich countries in September in Pittsburgh, according to the draft. The final document is to be released later in the day.

Raising barriers to imports was an important factor that contributed to the crisis of the 1930s. Governments, including the United States with its Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, sought to protect domestic businesses and farmers by blocking imports. Trade withered as a result.

The so-called G-5 developing countries issued a separate statement on Wednesday expressing the importance of concluding the talks.

"We are concerned with the present state of the world economy, which submits the developing countries to an inordinate burden resulting from a crisis they did not initiate," the G-5 said. Concluding the Doha round would aid "the restoration of confidence in the world markets and inhibit emerging protectionist trends," the G-5 said.

The Group of 8 industrialized nations of Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States on Thursday opened their annual summit to Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa, as well as Egypt. Also signing off on the trade goals were the leaders of Australia, Indonesia and South Korea.

The so-called Group of 5, making their fifth straight appearance at the annual summit meeting, albeit as guests, will discuss climate change, development aid, global growth and trade with their Group of 8 counterparts -- all topics touched on by G-8 leaders at their own meeting on Wednesday.

Among the G-8 leaders, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and Mr. Sarkozy of France have been particularly vocal that the G-8 needs to be expanded to better represent the world's population and economies. Mr. Sarkozy told reporters on Wednesday that a possible formula would be to have the G-8 meet within the structure of a G-20, with major economies taking the lead on ways out of the economic crisis.

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2009

Obama's nuclear balancing act

Cutting a deal with Russia was the easy part. It'll be far tougher back home.

Philip Taubman

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA As President Obama will soon discover, erasing the nuclear weapons legacy of the Cold War is like running the Snake River rapids in Wyoming — the first moments in the tranquil upstream waters offer little hint of the vortex ahead.

Now that Mr. Obama has set a promising arms reduction agenda with President Dmitri Medvedev of Russia, he faces the greater challenge of getting his own government and the U.S. nuclear weapons establishment to support his audacious plan to make deep weapons cuts and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons.

So far, Mr. Obama has effectively coupled an overarching vision of getting to a world without nuclear weapons, outlined in a speech in Prague earlier this year, with concrete first steps like the one-quarter reduction in operational strategic nuclear weapons promised in Moscow this week.

Given his short time in office, and the looming December expiration of the treaty with Russia covering strategic nuclear arms reductions, the new limits are a good, realistic start. It is especially important to extend the monitoring and verification provisions of the expiring arms accord.

But the overall Obama approach involves a balancing act that requires him to move boldly while reassuring opponents that he is not endangering our security. Put simply, he has to maintain a potent nuclear arsenal while slashing it.

Mr. Obama might consider Ronald Reagan's experience when he tried to set a similar course. The nuclear weapons crowd practically disowned Reagan when he proposed abolishing nuclear weapons during his 1986 summit meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik, Iceland. After the meeting, when Reagan asked his generals to explore the ramifications of possibly sharply cutting warheads and eliminating nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles, they politely but firmly told their commander in chief it was a terrible idea.

Mr. Obama's moment of truth with his generals is coming later this year when the Pentagon completes its periodic Nuclear Posture Review. This, in the Pentagon's words, "will establish U.S. nuclear deterrence policy, strategy and force posture for the next 5 to 10 years." So it will be the American nuclear weapons bible for the remainder of Mr. Obama's presidency, one term or two.

President Obama must make sure it reflects his thinking. That will not be automatic, because the nuclear weapons complex — the array of Pentagon and Energy Department agencies involved in nuclear operations, including the armed services and the weapons labs — harbors considerable doubt about his plans. The same goes for the wider world of defense strategists. There is resistance in Congress, too.

The view in these quarters is that the weapons cuts Mr. Obama envisions — deeper than the modest goals set in Moscow this week — would dangerously undermine the power of America's arsenal to deter attacks against the United States and its allies. Sentiment also favors building a new generation of warheads, a step Mr. Obama has rejected.

If the White House does not assert itself, the Nuclear Posture Review could easily spin off in unhelpful directions. The review that was produced when Bill Clinton was president in 1994 offered a rehash of Cold War policies. The one that was done when George W. Bush took office in 2001 was more unconventional, but was quickly overshadowed by the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and the war in Iraq.

To serve Mr. Obama's interests, the new review should lay the groundwork for pronounced cuts in weapons and shape America's nuclear stockpile to fit a world in which threats are more likely to come from states like North Korea and Iran than from a heavily armed power like Russia.

After the review, the next big test for Mr. Obama will likely be Senate consideration of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. He has pledged to resubmit this 1996 United Nations treaty, which was flatly rejected by the Senate in 1999.

To get the two-thirds majority needed for its approval, Mr. Obama will need to hold his fellow Democrats in line — far from a sure thing — and also pick up some Republican support. Two influential Republican senators — John McCain and Richard Lugar — are pivotal. Both voted against the treaty in 1999.

Opponents wrongly argue that the treaty is unverifiable. That might have been the case a decade ago, but technological advances make monitoring of even small underground nuclear tests possible today. Critics also say a permanent ban on testing — the United States has honored a moratorium since 1992 — would eventually cripple the nation's ability to maintain reliable warheads. So far, most weapons experts would say, that has not proven to be true and should not be for many years.

Few presidential moments are more glittering than the announcement of arms reduction accords in the Kremlin's gilded halls. For Mr. Obama, that was the easy part.

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INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2009

Nuclear madness

James Carroll

"Moby Dick" is the saga of the American soul, a cosmic contest with an "intangible malignity." The sea monster was "the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies ... all the subtle demonisms of life and thought, all evil ... all the general rage and hate" felt by the human race "from Adam down." Onto this enemy, Captain Ahab "as if his chest had been a mortar ... burst his hot heart's shell."

Ahab's corpse wound up lashed to the hump of his nemesis, but what if Herman Melville had ended his novel differently? What if, in defeat, Ahab had been cursed to survive for decades more, wandering the back alleys and waterfronts of whaling cities, an embodiment of impotence and hubris, a living figure less of tragedy than pathos? Then the story would have been not Ahab's, but Robert S. McNamara's.

A Washington cliché refers to the Pentagon as the Great White Whale, the leviathan on the Potomac. Yet that something monstrous had indeed been loosed there was hinted at in 1949 when the first secretary of defense, James Forrestal, fell into a catatonic state at his desk, only to commit suicide a few weeks later.

The Pentagon's malignity had been made tangible by the new atomic bomb, which contorted Forrestal's stress, but when he died the U.S. nuclear arsenal stood at less than 200. By the time McNamara took office, that figured had mushroomed to nearly 20,000 — an insane escalation unrelated to the vastly inferior Soviet accumulation. McNamara saw his first task as taming this nuclear monster. Instead, he presided over its further mutation, spurring massive growth. He spent the rest of his life railing against the very nuclear madness he had helped unleash.

McNamara had played a role in the invention of strategic bombing during World War II, and when it came to the Vietnam War, he firmly believed that bombing would be key to American victory. Proven wrong, he became so hinged that President Johnson feared his secretary of defense would end as "another Forrestal." At McNamara's last top-level meeting, he went ballistic; "The goddamned bombing campaign," he screamed, "it's been worth nothing, it's done nothing, they've dropped more bombs than in all of Europe in all of World War II, and it hasn't done a [expletive deleted] thing!"

Not even the end of the Cold War released us from the grip of the Cold War behemoth.

McNamara did not kill himself, as his predecessor did — but he spent his four remaining decades a haunted, haunting figure. As he had tried to tame the nuclear beast and failed, he had tried to undo his mistake in Vietnam, and failed. As the war raged on for most of a decade more, he never openly denounced it - nor any of the other futile American wars that followed. He was as broken as Ahab — and Forrestal — but was cursed to wander on, a living pariah of regret.

The obsequies at McNamara's death have left out the largest part of his story, like remembering Ahab without mentioning Moby Dick. In fact, McNamara's nemesis lives. For all his faults, McNamara had bravely launched himself against the tangible malignity, as if his chest had been a mortar. His brief but frenzied effort to lash what he had himself set loose came to nothing. Self-pity trumped bravery in the end. But the point is less about McNamara's failure than ours. America recast itself as a garrison state in the middle of the 20th century, handing over the largest part of its treasure and genius to war and war readiness. We blindly lashed our economy, academy, and culture to a nuclear engine that defeats the moral agency of our greatest leaders. Not even the end of the Cold War released us from the grip of the Cold War behemoth.

Today, many who hold President Obama in high regard are disappointed that his military policies are so familiar: an incipient Vietnam in Afghanistan; NATO expansion and missile defense ongoing; Pentagon spending unchecked — all contradicting what Obama led the world to expect.

The president is responsible for his choices, but something else is at work. That the timid nuclear agreement he achieved in Moscow last week, protecting thousands of nukes for years, was nevertheless denounced as sell-out shows the problem. The great white whale of American militarism thrashes on. Robert McNamara, in his long agony, was the prophet of our unfinished task.

BOSTON GLOBE

THE JAPAN TIMES WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2009

Thai politics faces Thaksin confrontation

ANALYSIS

Martin Petty
Bangkok
REUTERS

With a big turnout at a rally of his supporters and another landslide by-election win for his party at the weekend, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has proved he is still a force in Thai politics, even in exile.

More than 20,000 "red shirt" demonstrators braved the rain in Bangkok to demand new elections in the biggest pro-Thaksin rally since April, when the army was called in to break up violent street protests.

And a second successive victory for the Thaksin-backed Puea Thai party in a pivotal by-election Sunday indicates he is still popular among the rural masses, despite Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's claim that he is a spent political force.

Analysts say the strengthening of Thaksin's parliamentary and extra-parliamentary movements could plunge Thailand into deeper political turmoil, stifling economic recovery efforts and heightening the risk of more civil unrest.

"As long as Thaksin is a force, his supporters will use all means to contest this government," said Somjai Phagaphasvivat, a political science professor at Bangkok's Thammasat University. "The opposition to Thaksin will remain, with the prospect of more confrontation and violence, and no chance of compromise or national reconciliation."

The "red shirts" say Abhisit is an illegitimate stooge who relied on army-orchestrated parliamentary defections to give his Democrats a slender majority after the courts dissolved the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party in December.

After weeks of protests, Thaksin's supporters caused huge embarrassment for Abhisit on April 11 when they breached military lines to force the cancellation of an Asian summit in Pattaya, when half of the leaders had to be evacuated by helicopter.

Bangkok street clashes two days later plunged Thailand deeper into chaos and pictures aired across the world of burning buses, hijacked gasoline tankers and troops firing rifles did nothing to restore investors' confidence or attract tourists back.

The Oxford-educated Abhisit, whose Democrats head a fragile six-party coalition, has said he will not call an election until the export-driven economy has recovered and a process of constitutional reform is complete.

The Finance Ministry forecast last week that the economy would shrink 2.5 percent to 3.5 percent this year.

Analysts say Thaksin's aim is to harass and discredit Abhisit in Parliament and on the streets before the public sees any benefit from the government's 1.43 trillion baht ($42 billion) economic stimulus packages.

The "red shirts" want an early election because the Puea Thai party stands a good chance of winning a house majority.

If successful, Puea Thai would be expected to pursue legislative changes that would allow Thaksin, sentenced in absentia in October to two years in prison for graft, to return from exile in Dubai and launch a political comeback.

"The longer Abhisit remains in power, the harder it will be for Puea Thai to win votes in the next election," said Sombat Thamrongthanyawong, a political scientist from the National Institute of Development Administration. "That means there will be more pressure on Abhisit, making it harder for him to fix the economy. Thaksin will do whatever it takes to accelerate the timing of a new election."

THE JAPAN TIMES WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2009

Settlement saga continues

WILLIAM PFAFF

Paris

The Obama administration's confrontation with Israel over its colonies inside the Palestine territories began as a test of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's willingness to enter serious negotiations on a Middle Eastern settlement. It actually possesses potential dimensions that few today imagine.

Netanyahu first counted on the Likud and settlement lobbies in Washington to produce, as always in the past, a disingenuous formula that would allow the colonies to continue to expropriate Palestinian land and expand the settlements, while the U.S. government oversaw essentially meaningless negotiations with the Palestinians.

The prime minister was in Europe this week, and told RAI, Italian state radio, that after President Barack Obama had declared in his Cairo speech that the construction of new settlements must stop, he — Netanyahu — had replied "No," but had accepted Obama's call for a two-state solution with the Palestinians, which he previously had refused, provided that it took place under specified conditions.

The conditions would deny a prospective Palestine state of full sovereignty, control of its frontiers or of its security, economy and trade, airspace, and water and other natural resources. The conditions are obviously unacceptable, as they are meant to be.

Netanyahu's proposal constituted a message to the Palestinians that they should expect nothing from his government, and to Obama that Israel expects the United States to ask nothing further from it, and to resume the meaningless negotiations that have gone on since U.S. President George H.W. Bush tried and failed to confront Israel on extension of the settlements.

The Israeli president went on to say, "I think the more we spend time arguing about (the settlements) the more we waste time instead of moving toward peace."

On Wednesday, he paid an official visit to France, expecting congratulations on his agreement to the creation of a Palestinian state. Instead, President Nicolas Sarkozy told him that France "would no longer accept Israeli subterfuges meant to disguise colony construction by the pretext of 'natural growth' in the settlements."

This position already had been characterized by Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman as making it "impossible for Israel to build synagogues or kindergartens, or to add rooms for a family."

Lieberman, who immigrated to Israel from Moldova, wishes Israel's Arab citizens — survivors of the original Arab population of what is now Israel — issued with special identity documents and encouraged to quit Israel. One might think that if they did they would leave real estate vacancies that could accommodate expanding Jewish settler families.

Netanyahu was scheduled to meet on Thursday in Paris with former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell, Obama's special envoy on Mideast affairs, but the meeting was canceled by the U.S. side (reported Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth), and Mitchell returned to Washington. The White House unofficially made it known that there would be no further meetings with Netanyahu until there was a real settlement freeze. (The Israeli denial of the newspaper report, and the Washington statement that the cancellation was mutual, were flimflam).

Now this is all very well, in principle a long-overdue restoration of justice and realism to American policy on Israel and Palestine, but what follows? Would the American position on a settlement freeze be enforced with financial or political sanctions if the Netanyahu government refused to yield?

Netanyahu was elected to defy the U.S. on the colonies and on Palestinian statehood. Since few sensible people in Israel wish to alienate Washington, the Netanyahu government, again in principle, might be brought down by U.S. sanctions.

What then? The settlement movement, which has gone on now for some four decades, has become integral to the Israeli perception of national destiny and national security. The number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank and the Palestinian sector of Jerusalem now approaches a half-million. The settlements with their connecting roads, security installations and outposts dominate some 40 percent of the West Bank territories.

Geoffrey Aronson of the Foundation for Middle East Peace in Washington, sympathetic to the Palestinians, writes in the Foundation's most recent newsletter that merely a freeze in settlement construction would require Israel to "undo the system by which the military establishment, the legislative and executive arms of the state, settlers, and public, private, and supranational communal organizations collaborate in the encouragement and expansion of settlements."

Major elements in the state administration, defense forces, planning and budget agencies, and security programs and practices, plus the incentives to individuals and business to develop the settlements, would have to be undone.

He concludes that even a real freeze would require "an undertaking so complex and requiring an Israeli political decision so profound that no Israeli government would undertake (it) except as a result of a broader decision to terminate (the entire occupation of the Palestinian territories)."

That is wholly impossible without a huge, internationally guaranteed reconstruction of the security relationships of Palestinians, Israelis, and the surrounding Arab states, which is all but unimaginable. But then what is imaginable? Going on as things are? Clarification of Obama administration policy is essential.

William Pfaff is a Paris-based veteran political analyst and columnist for the International Herald Tribune.

THE JAPAN TIMES THURSDAY, JULY 2, 2009

The end of radical Islam in sight?

Joshua Muravchik
Washington
THE WASHINGTON POST

Is history ending yet again?

Much as the hammers that leveled the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the Cold War, so might the protests rocking Iran signal the death of radical Islam and the challenges it poses to the West.

No, that doesn't mean we'll be removing the metal detectors from our airports anytime soon. Al-Qaida and its ilk, even diminished in strength, will retain the ability to stage terrorist strikes. But the danger brought home on Sept. 11, 2001, was always greater than the possibility of murderous attacks. It was the threat that a hostile ideology might come to dominate large swaths of the Muslim world.

Not all versions of this ideology — variously called Islamism or radical Islam — are violent. But at the core of even the peaceful ones, such as that espoused by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, is the idea that the Islamic world has been victimized by the West and must defend itself. Even before the United States invaded Iraq, stoking rage, polls in Muslim countries revealed support for Osama bin Laden and for al-Qaida's aims, if not its methods. If such thinking were to triumph in major Muslim countries beyond Iran — say, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia — violent extremists would command vast new stores of personnel, explosives and funds.

This is precisely the nightmare scenario that is now receding. Even if the Iranian regime succeeds in suppressing the protests and imposes the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by force of bullets and mass arrests, it will have forfeited its legitimacy, which has always rested on an element of consent as well as coercion. Most Iranians revered Ayatollah Khomeini, but when his successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, declared the election results settled, hundreds of thousands of Iranians took to the streets, deriding his anointed candidate with chants of "Death to the dictator!"

"Even if they manage to hang on for a month or a couple of years, they've shed the blood of their people," says Egyptian publisher and columnist Hisham Kassem. "It's over."

The downfall or discrediting of the regime in Tehran would deal a body blow to global Islamism which, despite its deep intellectual roots, first achieved real influence politically with the Iranian revolution of 1979. And it would also represent just the most recent — and most dramatic — in a string of setbacks for radical Islam.

Election outcomes over the past two years have completely undone the momentum that Islamists had achieved with their strong showing at the polls in Egypt in 2005 and Palestine in 2006.

This countertrend began in Morocco in 2007. The Justice and Development Party (PJD), a moderate Islamist group that had registered big gains five years before, was expected to win parliamentary elections. But it carried only 14 percent of the vote, finishing second to a conservative party aligned with the royal palace. And in municipal elections earlier this month, the PJD's vote sank to 7 percent.

Jordanians also went to the polls in 2007 and handed the Islamic Action Front "one of its worst election defeats since Jordan's monarchy restored Parliament in 1989," as The Washington Post reported. The party won only six of the 22 seats, and on a more level field, the Islamists' tally sank to 2 percent and six out of 270 elected seats. Moreover, they were turned out of power in the North West Frontier Province, previously their stronghold.

In April, Indonesian Islamist parties that had emerged four years earlier to capture 39 percent of the vote lost ground in parliamentary elections this time around, falling to below 30 percent. "You can't pray away a bad economy, unemployment, poverty and crime," one voter, a 45-year old shop assistant, told Agence France Press.

Then in May came parliamentary elections in Kuwait, where women had won the right to vote and hold office in 2005 but had never yet won office. Even though the Islamic Salafi Alliance issued a fatwa against voting for female candidates, four captured seats in Parliament. Adding insult to injury for the Islamists, their representation fell from 21 seats to 11. "There is a new mind set here in Kuwait," the Al-Jazeera network reported, "and it's definitely going to reverberate across the Gulf region."

Finally, Lebanon held a tense election last month that many expected would result in the triumph of Hezbollah and its allies over the pro-Western March 14 coalition. Instead, the latter carried the popular vote and nailed down a commanding majority in Parliament.

Of course, each election featured its own dynamics, reflecting local alignments and issues, but they all point in the same direction for radical Islam — a direction reinforced by recent opinion polls in the Muslim world. Last year, the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that from 2002 to 2008, the proportion of respondents saying that suicide bombing was sometimes or often justified dropped from 74 percent to 32 percent in Lebanon, from 33 percent to 5 percent in Pakistan, from 43 percent to 25 percent in Jordan and from 26 percent to 11 percent in Indonesia. As a food stand operator in Jakarta put it: "People are less supportive of terrorist attacks because we know what terrorism does, we're afraid of attacks."

Military and social developments in Iraq and Pakistan also seem to be bending to the same wind. Whatever the contribution of the U.S. military "surge" of 2007, the tide of battle shifted in Iraq when broad swaths of the Sunni community that had supported or participated in the resistance to U.S. occupation turned their guns against the insurgent group al-Qaida in Iraq. And this year, the moderate government in Pakistan finally seems to have turned decisively against the Taliban. Although many critics believe that the central government lacked the will and ability to subdue the radicals, it has suppressed them in the Swat region and is now carrying the battle into their Waziristan heartland.

What explains this broad reversal for the forces of Islamic extremism?

Clearly, citizens in Pakistan and Iraq were repelled by the brutality of the radicals, as have been many in such other Muslim countries as Jordan, Egypt and Indonesia, which have suffered domestic terrorism attacks. Nor has the Islamists' performance in power in Afghanistan, Sudan and Gaza won any admiration. The Internet and other communications technology is entangling the younger generation of Muslims more thoroughly with their Western counterparts than their elders, making appeals to turn away from the West ring hollow.

Others point to U.S. influence as well. As developments in Iran have unfolded over the past weeks, a minor Washington debate has emerged — along partisan lines — over whether President George W. Bush's tough policies blunted the force of the radicals, or whether President Barack Obama's open hand has assuaged anti-American anger and inspired anti-regime forces. Both might be true. Or neither.

Regardless of the underlying causes, a defeated or merely discredited Islamic Republic of Iran could mark the beginning of the end of radical Islam. Until now, Iran has offered the only relatively successful example of Islamist rule, but the bloody events there are strengthening the momentum against radicalism and theocracy in the Muslim world. If the regime hangs on, it will depend increasingly on the militia and other security forces and less on its religious stature.

Of course, the fading of radicalism would not necessarily mean the disappearance of Islamic politics. The Egyptian intellectual Saad Edin Ibrahim noted in the Wall Street Journal last week that Islamist parties are being "cut down to size," and he hopes that they "evolve into Muslim democratic parties akin to the Christian Democrats in Europe."

That would be a result the West could live with.

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THE JAPAN TIMES THURSDAY, JULY 2, 2009

Don't bait the Russian bear

BRAHMA CHELLANEY

New Delhi

U.S. President Barack Obama's Moscow visit offers a historic opportunity to avert a new Cold War by establishing a more stable and cooperative relationship between the West and Russia.

Obama has reiterated his "commitment to a more substantive relationship with Russia." This needs to translate into policy moves symbolizing new, broad engagement.

Three important facts about Russia stand out. One, Russia has gradually become a more assertive power after stemming its precipitous decline and drift of the 1990s. Two, it now plays the Great Game on energy. Competition over control of hydrocarbon resources was a defining feature of the Cold War and remains an important driver of contemporary geopolitics, as manifest from the American occupation of Iraq and U.S. military bases or strategic tie-ups stretching across the oil-rich Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia.

Three, Russian democracy has moved toward greater centralized control to bring order and direction to the state. During Vladimir Putin's presidency, government control was extended to large swaths of the economy and the political opposition was systematically emasculated.

Such centralization, though, is no different than in, say, Singapore and Malaysia, including the domination of one political party, the absence of diversified media, limits on public demonstrations and the writ of security services. But in contrast to Russia, Singapore and Malaysia have insulated themselves from U.S. criticism by willingly serving Western interests. When did you last hear official American criticism of Singapore's egregious political practices?

Yet Russia faces a rising tide of Western censure for gradually sliding toward autocratic control at home. Actually, ideological baggage, not dispassionate strategic deliberation, tends to often color U.S. and European discourse on Russia.

Another reason is Russia's geographical presence in Europe, the "mother" of both the Russian and U.S. civilizations. There is thus a greater propensity to hold Russia to European standards, unlike, say, China. Also, Russia was considered a more plausible candidate for democratic reform than China, now the world's largest, oldest and strongest autocracy. Little surprise Russia's greater centralization evokes fervent Western reaction.

Today's Russia, however, bears little resemblance to the Soviet Union. Life for the average Russian is freer and there is no Soviet-style shortage of consumer goods. There are also no online censors regulating Internet content as in China, and criticism of the Russian government is, by and large, tolerated, especially if it does not threaten the position of those in power.

While China seeks to project power in distant lands, including Africa and Latin America, Russia wishes to project power in its own neighborhood, or what it calls its "Far Abroad," including Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, Central Asia and the Caucuses. Given its geopolitical focus on states in its vicinity, not on the "Far Abroad," Russia, with its size and clout, is able to bring pressure and intimidation to bear on such adjacent states. And given its own relative stability, Russia is able to exploit political instability in neighboring states.

But what now looks like a resurgent power faces major demographic and economic challenges to build and sustain great-power capacity over the long run.

Demographically, Russia is even in danger of losing its Slavic identity and becoming a Muslim-majority state in the decades ahead, unless government incentives succeed in encouraging Russian women to have more children. The average age of death of a Russian male has fallen to 58.9 years — nearly two decades below an American. While Japan faces a population decline, Russia confronts depopulation.

Economically, the oil-price crash has come as a warning to Russia against being a largely petro-state.

In fact, Moscow's economic fortunes for long have been tied too heavily to oil — a commodity with volatile prices. In 1980, the Soviet Union overtook Saudi Arabia as the biggest oil producer. But oil prices began to decline, plummeting to $9 a barrel in mid-1986. U.S. intelligence, failing to read the significance of this, continued to claim Moscow was engaged in massive military modernization. During the Putin presidency, rising oil prices played a key role in Russian economic revival.

The higher the oil prices, the less the pressure there is on Russia to restructure and diversify its economy. The present low prices thus offer an opportunity to Moscow to reform.

Still, it should not be forgotten that Russia is the world's wealthiest country in natural resources — from fertile farmlands and metals, to gold and timber. It sits on colossal hydrocarbon reserves. It also remains a nuclear and missile superpower. Indeed, to compensate for the erosion in its conventional-military capabilities, it has increasingly relied on its large nuclear arsenal, which it is ambitiously modernizing.

The lesson of China in the post-Tiananmen era is that engagement and integration are better than sanctions and isolation. Today, with a new chill setting in on relations between the West and Russia, that lesson is in danger of getting lost.

Whatever its future, the big question is: What is the right international approach toward a resurgent Russia? Here two aspects need to be borne in mind.

First, Russia geopolitically is the most important "swing" state in the world today. Its geopolitical swing worth more than China's or India's. While China is inextricably tied to the U.S. economy and India's geopolitical direction is clearly set toward closer economic and political engagement with the West — even as New Delhi retains its strategic autonomy — Russia is a wild card. A wrong policy course on Russia by the West would not only prove counterproductive to Western interests, but also affect international peace and security. It would push Moscow inexorably in the wrong direction, creating a new East-West divide.

Second, there are some useful lessons applicable to Russia that the West can draw on how it has dealt with another rising power. China has come a long way since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre of prodemocracy demonstrators. What it has achieved in the last generation in terms of economic modernization and the opening of minds is extraordinary. That owes a lot to the West's decision not to sustain trade sanctions after Tiananmen Square but instead to integrate China into global institutions.

That the choice made was wise can be seen from the baneful impact of the opposite decision taken on Burma after 1988 — to pursue a punitive approach relying on sanctions. Had the Burma-type approach been applied against China, the result would not only have been a less-prosperous and less-open China, but also a more-paranoid and possibly destabilizing China. The obvious lesson is that engagement and integration are better than sanctions and isolation.

Today, with a new chill setting in on relations between the West and Russia, that lesson is in danger of getting lost. Russia's 16-year effort to join the World Trade Organization has still to bear fruit, even as Moscow is said to be in the last phase of negotiations, and the U.S.-Russian nuclear deal remains on hold in Washington.

Little thought has been given to how the West lost Russia, which during its period of decline eagerly sought to cozy up to the U.S. and Europe, only to get the cold shoulder from Washington. And even as NATO is being expanded right up to Russia's front yard and after the U.S. led the action in engineering Kosovo's February 2008 self-proclamation of independence, attention has focused since last August on Moscow's misguided, five-day military intervention in Georgia and its recognition of the self-declaration of independence by South Ossetia and Abkhazia — actions that some have tried to portray as the 21st century's first forcible changing of borders.

But having sponsored Kosovo's self-proclamation of independence, the U.S. and some of its allies awkwardly opposed the same right of self-determination for the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Can the legitimacy of a self-declaration of independence depend on which great power sponsors that action?

The world cannot afford a new Cold War, which is what constant baiting of the Russian bear will bring. Fortunately, there are some positive signs. Seeking to heel the rift triggered by the yearlong developments over Georgia, the U.S. and Russia are resuming full military cooperation and have reopened negotiations on nuclear arms control, with the talks centered on quickly establishing a successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, whose 15-year term runs out Dec. 5. Also, the U.S. is going slow on missile-defense deployments in Eastern Europe and there is a de facto postponement of NATO expansion to Ukraine and Georgia.

Russia, for its part, has continued to provide critical logistic assistance to the U.S. and NATO military operations in Afghanistan. As part of what Obama has called a "reset" of the bilateral relationship, a U.S.-Russia joint commission headed by Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev is being established, along with several sub-commissions. This is an improvement on the 1993 commission established at the level of No. 2s, Vice President Al Gore and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

To be sure, fundamental differences between Washington and Moscow persist on some major international and regional issues — from U.S. opposition to the Russian idea for an international treaty to outlaw cyberspace attacks along the lines of the Chemical Weapons Convention to the continuing discord over Georgia spurring rival military maneuvers in the Caucasus region.

The increasingly authoritarian Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, blamed by some international analysts for provoking last year's war through a military strike on South Ossetia that killed Russian peacekeepers and civilians, has become for Moscow what Cuba's then leader Fidel Castro was for Washington — the villain-in-chief.

The key issue is whether the U.S. and Russia will rise above their differences and seize the new opportunity to redefine their relationship before it becomes too late. For Russia, the challenge is to engage a skeptical West more deeply. It also needs to increase its economic footprint in Asia, where its presence is largely military. For the U.S., the challenge is to pursue new geopolitics of engagement with Moscow.

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THE JAPAN TIMES SATURDAY, JULY 4, 2009

Brutal insurgency haunts sleepy Thai Muslim south

Martin Petty
Yala Thailand
REUTERS

When he heard the loud cracks of gunfire, Prapan Pormapat knew the insurgents had just claimed another victim.

An engine roared as two gunmen sped away on a motorcycle, leaving behind the body of a saffron-robed Buddhist monk in a pool of blood.

"Everyone here carries a gun now," said Prapan, a Buddhist tailor, recounting the chilling tale of when a shadowy five-year rebellion first struck in this sleepy neighborhood of Yala in southern Thailand.

"I rarely go out," he said. "I'm too scared to travel anywhere. We don't know who is behind this violence, or what they want."

Thailand's Muslim deep south has become the battleground of one of the world's most mysterious conflicts, a brutal insurgency that has claimed nearly 3,500 lives since 2004.

A climate of fear and intimidation has gripped the provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani, and the 30,000 troops here offer little protection against the near-daily bombings and shootings.

The soldiers sent to crush the insurgency have no idea who they are fighting.

"We don't know where the attacks will come from," said Daeng, an army colonel, nervously huddled behind a wall of barbed wire and sandbags at a checkpoint outside a Muslim village. "We don't know if these people live in this village, or if they've come here to kill us."

With its rolling hills and thick jungle dotted with white village mosques, the rubber-rich region bordering Malaysia is one of Thailand's most picturesque, but the unrelenting violence has ensured tourists and investors keep well away.

"The only businesses making any money here are the ones selling guns," said Wirach Assawasuksant, president of Yala's Chamber of Commerce. He carries a gun himself. "There's no new investment, insurance premiums are too high. All the businesses are suffering."

At dusk, a provincial capital once abuzz with shoppers and packed restaurants now resembles a ghost town after a slew of drive-by shootings and motorcycle bombings, carried out just 1.5 km away from an army base housing several thousand troops.

No credible group has claimed responsibility for the violence in the deep south, which was part of an ethnic Malay Muslim sultanate annexed by Buddhist Thailand a century ago.

The army says it has "dramatically improved" its intelligence gathering, but admits its counterinsurgency capabilities are limited because it is unsure exactly who the enemy is.

Even individual insurgents are kept in the dark.

"They don't know who they are fighting for or who is giving their orders," said Col. Parinya Chaidilok, a senior Yala-based official from Thailand's powerful Internal Security Operations Command. "The groups have not revealed themselves, or who their leaders are. If we know, we can have dialogue, we can find out what they want."

Security analysts say the insurgency is an independence struggle by Malay Muslims rebelling against 100 years of forced assimilation and Thai Buddhist "oppression."

Although the campaign appears to target symbols of the Thai state — police, soldiers, teachers — more than half of the victims have been Muslims, which has fed speculation about extrajudicial killings by security forces and state-armed Buddhist defense volunteers.

Feelings of anger, alienation and injustice are rife, with relations between Muslims and security forces strained by the failure to investigate state officials for the deaths, torture and disappearances of villagers.

When 11 Muslims where shot dead by mystery gunmen as they prayed at Narathiwat's Al Furquan mosque on June 8, the government had difficulty convincing villagers it was the work of Muslim militants.

"I suspect the authorities are behind it, because no one has been arrested," says Bearmah, showing his disdain for the troops during a discussion with locals in a rustic village tea shop in Pattani. "Muslims don't kill other Muslims praying in a mosque."

The mosque deaths in Cho Airong district, a "red zone" the military says is "infested" with insurgents, added to the 43 people killed and 70 injured in the south in the last month alone.

With lives at stake, most people are afraid to discuss separatism, or to speculate as to who is behind the violence.

"We don't know what these attacks are about, or who is doing this," said an elderly man, smoking hand-rolled cigarettes among a group of villagers after evening prayers in Pattani. "All we want to know is why all these soldiers cannot stop these killings."

THE JAPAN TIMES SATURDAY, JULY 4, 2009

The key to North Korea

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il decided long ago that nuclear weapons were his best protection against an external threat of regime change. In ill health and preparing his youngest son, "Brilliant Comrade" Kim Jong Un, to succeed him, Kim seems to have decided that the bomb also is crucial to staving off an internal threat to the family dynasty that has ruled the hermit state since its founding.

His powerful military wants a nuclear deterrent, and Kim wants to deliver it by 2012. That makes the prospect of nuclear disarmament doubly difficult. The pending succession adds a layer of uncertainty and risk to North Korea's standoff with the West.

That standoff is playing out on the high seas and in finance. The U.S. Navy is trailing a rusty North Korean cargo ship believed to have been ferrying missile parts for sale to Myanmar. U.N. sanctions to cut off North Korea's arms trade, which were enacted after Pyongyang's second nuclear test on May 25, allow the United States and its allies to intercept the ship. The North Korean government declared that would be an act of war and threatened to "wipe out aggressors."

But the ship apparently is turning back now, after U.S. moves to freeze assets and isolate companies that ease North Korea's weapons trade. Pyongyang, meanwhile, is poised to test-fire more missiles, and the U.S. has put defense systems on alert.

President Barack Obama says he'd like to break the cycle in which North Korea provokes an international crisis to extract aid and concessions from global powers that are trying to sanction Pyongyang into abandoning its nuclear ambitions. The key to ending this brinkmanship, however, lies not with Kim but with Beijing. China is North Korea's main Communist ally and trading partner, and although it would like to see an end to Pyongyang's nuclear program, it has so far demonstrated greater concern about the prospect of regime collapse that would likely create an economic crisis in the region.

China's patience seems to be wearing thin, as it signed on to the June 12 U.N. resolution. Obama's coordinator on the resolution, Ambassador Philip Goldberg, is in China this week and must work to convince the government that further steps are needed. A credible threat from Beijing to cut off trade could persuade Pyongyang to give up on nuclear weapons.

As with Iran, Obama should make clear to Kim that Washington seeks nuclear disarmament, not regime change. At the same time, he should make clear to China that if the North Korean regime were to collapse, the U.S. and its allies would help share the economic burden.

Los Angeles Times (July 2)

THE JAPAN TIMES SUNDAY, JULY 5, 2009

Fates of Iraqi sovereignty and Obama policy linked

WILLIAM PFAFF

Paris

With American troops having left the cities of Iraq, the calculation must begin as to whether some half-million to million lives lost, and the infrastructure and social structure of Baghdad and much of the rest of the Iraqi nation ruined, have served some good purpose.

The United States did this in order to hunt down and hang President Saddam Hussein for not possessing weapons of mass destruction (and for other and older grudges). He was a cruel ruler of the Iraqi people, although possibly no crueler than whoever it is that eventually will take his place, if the present parliamentary government fails, as it may.

If that happens, the first of the alternative outcomes possible are that the U.S. will abandon Iraq, withdraw all its forces and leave the country to civil war and chaos. This is what the Nixon administration actually did in Vietnam, professing otherwise, when it no longer had domestic popular support to continue fighting the Vietnamese Communists. It abandoned the Vietnamese (and the Cambodians and Laotians, whom the U.S. had forced into that war) to destinies much worse than if America had never heard of Southeast Asia.

The second possible outcome in Iraq would be that U.S. President Barack Obama would refuse to abandon President George W. Bush's war of choice, afraid of Bush Republican accusations of "surrender to terrorism" and "abandonment" of its allies. This would mean that he would defend his own war of choice, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the war Bush chose and Barack Obama condemned.

Obama might search for a palatable political escape by expanding the U.S. contingent of mercenaries already in Iraq. That might do little for Iraq, but rid him of a public relations embarrassment. One could call this the solution through dissimulation and public deception, as practiced by the Bush-Cheney-Rove White House.

In Iraq, the U.S. has done little effective to reinforce the fragile Shiite-Sunni truce that now exists. This writer has always believed this might prove a problem that solves itself, slowly, if painfully, as the two communities have to live together because they have no other place to go to live. They have coexisted on the fertile plain and delta separating the Euphrates and the Tigris since long before the prophet Muhammad existed.

The American invasion and occupation were responsible for the upheaval in the power relationship between the formerly ruling Sunni minority, associated with the tyrant's regime and the U.S.-outlawed Baath party, and the formerly oppressed Shiite majority. The latter lives at the frontier of the formerly revolutionary and now despotic Iran, which has been the center of Shiite power and religion since the Middle Ages, and one of the great empires of antiquity.

However, as the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war demonstrated, the Iraqi Shiites are not natural allies of their fellow-religionists in Iran, having played a patriotic role in the war of aggression Saddam Hussein launched, with American approval, against the Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran, because he feared Iraq's revolutionary threat and expected to defeat an Iran in disarray.

Instead, the Iranians — with the suicidal sacrifice of thousands of teenaged volunteers, the generation from which the present Revolutionary Guard elite derives, fought Iraq to a standstill, and then launched an invasion of Iraq, to which Iraq replied with poison gas. The casualties on both sides recall, in proportion to population, those of the 1914-1918 world war in Europe.

That leaves the most ominously unsettled issue in Iraq today, that of Kurdish territorial claims in the oil-rich area around Kirkuk, envenomed by forced expulsion of Kurds from the area by Hussein, and reciprocal expulsions of Arabs by Kurdish fighters, since America's sponsorship and protection allowed them to establish — within as yet unrecognized frontiers — a "sovereign" Kurdish autonomous zone, including Kirkuk.

This is rich in oil and coveted by foreign oil interests and governments, as well as by whatever government rules Baghdad. Neighboring Turkey and Iran, both

historically hostile to an autonomous Kurdistan, especially a rich one, have large stakes in what happens.

Last Monday and Tuesday nights, there were fireworks and celebrations in Iraq's cities of what Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki assured Iraq's people would be the arrival of national sovereignty at zero hour last Wednesday.

The American uniforms have left city streets, but the troops are nearby, ready to play the arbiter's role when trouble arrives. The combat units are supposed to be gone by the end of next year. All the Americans — except, presumably, the mercenaries, who have been as numerous as the soldiers — will go the following year. The sovereignty question will be answered between now and then.

So will the fate of the foreign policy of the Obama presidency.

Visit William Pfaff's Web site at www.williampfaff.com.

THE JAPAN TIMES WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 2009

Bolstering Japan-U.S. ties

HISAHIKO OKAZAKI

The Obama administration has shown great good will toward Japan. This was evidenced by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's testimony at her Senate confirmation hearing, her choice of Japan as the first country she visited after taking office and the fact that Prime Minister Taro Aso was the first foreign leader President Barack Obama met with after his inauguration.

This is an epoch-making development in Japan-U.S. relations attesting to the success of diplomacy on both sides. As a matter of fact, both Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Kurt Campbell have both made remarks emphasizing that these are proof of the importance the Obama administration attaches to Japan.

However, the Japanese media at that time mostly focused on reporting on then Minister of Finance Shoichi Nakagawa's embarrassing behavior at the Group of 20 meeting in Rome and failed to convey the United States' gesture of good will adequately to the public. In my opinion, the Japanese media have also demeaned themselves in this incident.

The Obama administration's favorable consideration given to Japan is not only demonstrated in its gestures, but also expressed clearly in the lineup of senior officials in charge of East Asian affairs. While there are many Americans who know Europe and the Americas well, few are knowledgeable about Asia. Policymaking related to Asia tends to rely very much on the knowledge of officials in charge of East Asia.

During the first half of the Clinton era, when frictions between Japan and the U.S. were serious, officials in charge of East Asia in the White House and the State and Defense Departments were all China experts. With no one knowledgeable about Japan, Japan was basically helpless.

However, the present chief policymaker on East Asia at the Department of Defense is Assistant Secretary Wallace Gregson, who used to be the Marine Corps commander in Okinawa and knows Japan well. Moreover, Kurt Campbell, who places high priority on the Japan-U.S. alliance, became the new assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific.

This is good news for Japan. On the other hand, what can Japan do in this situation? Actually, the Pacific Forum and three other groups held four seminars attended by more than 50 Asia experts last year. The result of the discussions was published in February as new proposals on Asian policy for the Obama administration. It is said that Campbell exercised strong leadership in the drafting of the report.

In one passage, the word "enough!" was used. What it meant was that since the U.S. is committed to the alliance, Japan should not be talking about such things as "Japan passing," and be so wishy-washy. The report demands that Japan, instead, should think of ways to contribute to the alliance on its own.

Campbell is one of the few experts on Japan from the Democratic Party camp. During the last days of the Clinton administration, he reportedly was fed up with the stream of Japanese politicians and business leaders calling on him.

However, in his recent hearings in the Senate, he did not seem to have been nonplussed by this tedious experience. He stated in no uncertain terms that the Japan-U.S. alliance is at the center of U.S. policy in Asia and that the U.S. should clearly convey its commitment to the alliance to its Japanese friends.

Shortly after the inauguration of the Bush administration, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage proposed a vice ministerial dialogue to strengthen the bilateral alliance. At that time, the Japanese Foreign Ministry was unable to respond to this effectively. So Armitage left office in disappointment. In contrast, his successor Robert Zoellick started the U.S.-China vice ministerial dialogue, which was hugely successful from the first round. China immediately obtained the status of a "stakeholder."

This time, the U.S. side is again hopeful that moves to help propel the Japan-U.S. relationship forward will be made under Campbell and Gregson's watch.

The political situation in Japan is such that the state of affairs after Prime Minister Taro Aso dissolves the Lower House remains completely uncertain. But at least, the Aso administration should still be in power when Campbell visits Japan. Even during the little time left, we hope that meaningful exchange of views with the new Obama administration will take place, and the path for the strengthening of the alliance in the future, even just portion of it, will be laid down for future administrations. Otherwise, the opportunity presented by the Campbell-Gregson team, as well as the team made up of James Jones, Hillary Clinton, and Robert Gates may be wasted, and they may become frustrated with Japan at an early stage.

It is also becoming evident what Japan needs to do. Recent statements by Japan experts in the U.S. show that although they had been coy in the past about their expectations about Japan exercising the right of collective self-defense, they are now speaking up on this subject. Next will come the issue of Japan boosting its defense capabilities in order to maintain the deterrence of the bilateral alliance.

The immediate issue for the two countries is the realignment of military bases, but this is a complicated issue linked to local circumstances in Okinawa. Certain aspects of the issue cannot be resolved by the central government's policies. So prospects remain unclear.

While it goes without saying that Japan needs to make efforts to resolve this problem, this does not mean that the more fundamental questions of the right of collective self-defense and Japan's need to increase defense spending can be deferred.

Hisahiko Okazaki is former ambassador to Thailand. This is a slightly abridged English translation of a Japanese article that originally appeared in the June 25 Seiron column of Sankei Shimbun.

THE JAPAN TIMES THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2009

Malaysians suffer from Anwar fatigue

Kuala Lumpur
REUTERS

The sodomy trial of Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was delayed again Wednesday while a new poll said government reforms were popular, an indication Anwar's influence is waning.

The judge said he would hear applications for dismissal of the case, discovery of evidence by the defense and to set a new date for the trial on July 15 after Anwar's lawyers said that they needed more time to prepare.

"I am not able to prepare evidence for my client. I have been given some but I need more," Anwar's lawyer Sankara Nair told reporters outside the court.

The trial had initially been scheduled for July 1.

Anwar denounced the trial that had been due to start Wednesday as a "despicable and desperate" move by the government to remove him from politics after the judge said he would delay it.

On an overcast day in the Malaysian capital, around a hundred black-clad opposition supporters shouting "Allah" and "reformasi" (reform) pushed into the court complex but there were no clashes with police, who heavily outnumbered them.

That was far fewer than the thousands who thronged court appearances in 1998 at the height of the Asian financial crisis after Anwar was dismissed as deputy prime minister and charged with sodomy and corruption in a case lasting 14 months.

Trial delayed . . . again: Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim speaks to journalists outside a courthouse in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday. REUTERS

"It is not as tension-filled as before. It is almost as if people are used to seeing this situation and frankly, I am tired of this case," said Mohd Amir Hamza, a shopkeeper who watched the arrival of Anwar and photographed him with his mobile phone.

The judge said Wednesday that he would hear applications for dismissal of the case and the discovery of evidence by the defense.

Anwar, 61, wearing a gray coat and fawn shirt and accompanied by his wife, told reporters after the hearing that the government was again persecuting him in a bid to maintain its 51-year grip on power in this Southeast Asian country of 27 million people.

"UMNO (the United Malays National Organization, the lead government coalition party) political leaders will resort to a repeat of this same game after seeing all their cards . . . are not enough to contain the tide of people wanting change," he said.

If found guilty in the court where a judge sits alone, Anwar could face 20 years in jail, effectively ending his career.

The National Front government, led by the UMNO, stumbled to its worst election losses in 2008, losing its two-thirds parliamentary majority and seeing five of 13 states fall to the opposition — a record haul.

Since then, the National Front has lost a series of state and parliamentary by-elections forcing the government to switch prime ministers, appointing Najib Razak, the son of Malaysia's second postindependence leader, to head the government in April.

In his first 100 days in office, Najib has announced an ambitious set of reforms aimed at boosting foreign investment in this export-dependent country whose economy is expected by the government to contract up to 5 percent this year.

Last week he unveiled a series of measures to open up the economy, risking the ire of the majority Malay population who saw some of their economic privileges removed.

Najib's personal popularity rating surged to 65 percent from 42 percent in mid-May, according to a poll from the independent Merdeka Center, and 60 percent of the 1,062 people questioned approved of the reforms.

"Quite clearly, a growing number of Malaysians like some of the policy initiatives of the prime minister and his inclusive message," said Ibrahim Suffian, head of the polling body.

THE JAPAN TIMES THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2009

Security talks with U.S. to include nuclear umbrella

Washington
KYODO

The United States and Japan are arranging official talks on a broad range of security issues, including a topic rarely on the agenda — the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

Involving officials at the director general level from the Foreign and Defense ministries and the U.S. State and Defense departments, the talks will be aimed at enhancing the bilateral alliance in light of the North Korean nuclear and missile threats and China's military buildup, sources knowledgeable about Japan-U.S. relations said Tuesday.

Such talks have not been held since September 2000, according to Japan, although officials at the deputy director general level have met frequently for unofficial talks over the realignment of U.S. forces Japan.

Top-level security talks — the so-called two-plus-two ministerial talks — were last held in May 2007.

The talks planned for as early as this month are expected to also address the reorganization and the cost of maintaining the U.S. military in Japan, as well as missile defense, the sources said.

The outcome of the talks will be reflected when Tokyo updates its five-year National Defense Program Outline at the end of this year and Washington works on its Quadrennial Defense Review and Nuclear Posture Review, they said.

The two governments have so far had a tendency not to go further than reaffirming the U.S. commitment to protect Japan with its nuclear umbrella, but this time they are expected to discuss such details as the U.S. nuclear strike capability and military deployment, they said.

The senior officials will also look into the consistency between President Barack Obama's nuclear disarmament policy and nuclear deterrence, according to the sources.

Other topics up for possible discussion are whether the U.S. might lift its export ban on F-22 stealth fighters, the use of space and measures against cyber attacks.

The two sides have accelerated their arrangements at the request of Japanese officials, particularly after delayed congressional approval in late June of Kurt Campbell as assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs.

But the arrangements may still take a sudden turn in the event of a change of power in Japan in the Lower House election. Some U.S. officials are said to be waiting to see the outcome of the race.

THE JAPAN TIMES THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2009

Hu's exit damages climate talks as emerging economies challenge the industrialized powers

G-8 summit gets off to rough start

Jun Hongo
STAFF WRITER
Rome

With the relevance of the Group of Eight being challenged by emerging powers, the G-8 leaders got down to business Wednesday addressing climate change and what their next move might be when and if the global recession subsides.

But the launch of the three-day G-8 summit in L'Aquila was spoiled even before it began, with Chinese President Hu Jintao returning home to get a handle on the ethnic riots tearing apart the restive city of Urumqi in the northwest.

A shadow also grew over the climate change issue as chances appeared slim that the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, or MEF, would be able to hammer out long-term greenhouse gas emissions cuts, Japanese diplomatic sources said.

The key multinational emissions forum was to meet Thursday on the sidelines of the summit in the Italian mountain town.

The sources said MEF preparatory negotiations failed to bridge the gap between members of the industrialized and developing countries, effectively dashing hopes of achieving a substantial agreement.

Hu's absence exacerbated the MEF discord, the sources said.

An initially prepared MEF draft declaration pledged a global emissions reduction of 50 percent by 2050, with industrialized countries promising an 80 percent cut in the same time frame, they said.

The 17-member MEF was established in March under the initiative of U.S. President Barack Obama to complete the groundwork for forging a new international carbon-capping framework to succeed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012.

Along with the G-8, major greenhouse gas emitters China, India and Brazil are also members of the MEF.

Despite the forum's apparent inability to produce tangible results, the G-8 was nevertheless expected to issue a joint statement on climate change later in the day, in addition to discussing the global economy, the sources said.

The eight leaders were expected to share views on how not to jeopardize the "green shoots" of recovery being seen in some areas, as well as "exit strategies" for reversing the heavy fiscal stimulus that many countries embraced to revive their economies, the sources said, adding that how to stave off global unemployment was also on the agenda.

During a working dinner, the G-8 was expected to focus on political matters, including domestic unrest in Iran and North Korea's nuclear threat.

Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, who agreed Tuesday to reduce the size of Russia's nuclear arsenal, were expected to lead the discussion on global denuclearization.

For Prime Minister Taro Aso, denuclearization and how

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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G-8 challenged

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to end North Korea's nuclear threat are expected to be key concerns.

Earlier this month, Foreign Ministry officials in Tokyo listed five key themes for this year's summit: Iran, North Korea, global denuclearization, the Middle East peace process and the war in Afghanistan.

The L'Aquila summit concludes Friday after assistance to Africa is discussed. But with emerging economic powers like Brazil and India being kept outside the discussion framework, critics say any talks held within the G-8 alone are incapable of resolving global economic issues.

In that sense, the Thursday meeting with the emerging powers will have more relevance than the G-8 itself, they said.

But Japanese officials defended the G-8 framework, saying its agreements are still influential in forming the base for discussions with other economic powers.

The G-8 includes the United States, Britain, Canada, Japan, Italy, Germany, France and Russia.

Information from Kyodo added

Three amigos: Prime Minister Taro Aso, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and U.S. President Barack Obama chuckle Wednesday before the Group of Eight summit kicks off in L'Aquila, Italy. AP

L'Aquila aid pledged

Rome STAFF REPORT

Prime Minister Taro Aso on Tuesday pledged financial and technological support to help L'Aquila, the Italian city hosting the Group of Eight summit, recover from the damage it suffered in a recent devastating earthquake, the Foreign Ministry said.

During a bilateral meeting held on the eve of the G-8 summit, Aso and his Italian counterpart, Silvio Berlusconi, shared their concerns over North Korea's and Iran's nuclear ambitions and vowed to cooperate through the G-8 framework to censure them.

Aso said Tokyo will assist in funding the construction of a gymnasium with Japanese earthquake resistance technology and also pledged to dispatch specialists to help restore damaged cultural assets.

Buildings in the central Italian city were reduced to rubble following a 6.3 magnitude earthquake in April that killed nearly 300.

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THE JAPAN TIMES THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2009

Spread of democracy stalls

BRAHMA CHELLANEY

New Delhi

Has the global spread of democracy run out of steam? For long, but especially since the end of the Cold War, democracy and free markets were touted as the twin answers to most ills. But while free-market tenets have come under strain in the present international financial crisis, with the very countries that espoused the self-regulating power of markets taking the lead to embrace principles of financial socialism to bail out their troubled corporate colossals, the spread of democracy is encountering increasingly strong head winds.

The strong-arm tactics Iranian authorities recently employed to quell demonstrations challenging President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election were no different than the use of state power by Burma's junta to suppress monk-led protests nearly two years ago. If there was any expectation of a "green revolution" in Iran or a "saffron revolution" in Burma, that hope lies crushed, at least for the time being. Indeed, the demonstrations that broke out in Iran represented not a democratic uprising but a struggle for ascendancy among those empowered by the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Between 1988 and 1990, as the Cold War was winding down, prodemocracy protests broke out in several parts of the world — from China and Burma to Eastern Europe. The protests helped spread political freedoms in Eastern Europe and inspired popular movements elsewhere that overturned dictatorships in countries as disparate as Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan and Chile. After the Soviet disintegration, even Russia emerged as a credible candidate for democratic reform.

The overthrow of a number of totalitarian or autocratic regimes helped shift the global balance of power in favor of the forces of democracy. But not all the prodemocracy movements were successful. And the "color revolutions" only instilled greater caution among surviving authoritarian regimes, prompting them to set up countermeasures to foreign-inspired democratization initiatives. As the 20th anniversary of the Berlin Wall's fall nears, it is evident that the spread of democracy has stalled.

Democracy may have become the norm in much of Europe, but in the world's largest and most densely populated continent, Asia, only a small minority of states are true democracies, despite the eastward movement of power and influence. The strategy to use market forces to open up tightly centralized political systems hasn't worked in multiple cases in Asia — the pivot of global strategic change.

Political homogeneity may be as incongruous as the parallel pursuit of market capitalism and political autocracy. But where authoritarianism is deeply entrenched, a marketplace of goods and services does not allow a marketplace of political ideas.

In fact, one autocracy distinctly has emerged stronger and wealthier. That autocracy — China — is the world's largest and oldest, with its leadership now preparing to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. To help glorify the communist revolution, the leadership has planned a mammoth military parade — the largest ever — along with a repeat of some of the Beijing Olympics glitz at the Oct. 1 anniversary.

Those Olympic-style celebrations would serve as a double reminder: China has not only weathered the international democratization push, but also has emerged as a potential peer rival to America. Today there is talk of even a U.S.-China diarchy — a G-2 — ruling the world.

China's spectacular rise as a global power in just one generation under authoritarian rule represents the first direct challenge to liberal democracy since the rise of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Through its remarkable success story, China advertises that authoritarianism is a more rapid and smoother way to prosperity and stability than the tumult of electoral politics.

Freedom advocates in autocracies may be inspired and energized by the international success stories of democratic transition. But the regimes that employ brute power and censorship to subdue protests and dissidence draw encouragement from the China model.

Then there is the specter of democracy in retreat, highlighted by the developments in Russia and the regressive path of some of the color revolutions, not to mention Central America's first military coup since the end of the Cold War in Honduras. The "tulip revolution" in Kyrgyzstan has turned sour in the face of flawed elections, assassination of political rivals and growing influence of organized crime. Georgia's "rose revolution" also has wilted under President Mikheil Saakashvili's increasing despotism.

In Russia, the political system has moved toward greater centralized control and limits on civil liberties. This mirrors the centralization in a number of Asian states, with some practicing soft authoritarianism and the others hard authoritarianism.

China, still in the "hard authoritarianism" category, has stayed abreast with technological innovations to help deny protesters the latest means to denounce injustice. The widespread use of Twitter, Facebook, instant messaging and cellular phones by Iranian protesters cannot be emulated by Chinese dissidents because Beijing employs cyber police to regulate Web sites, patrol cyber cafes, monitor cellular phone text messaging and track down Internet activists. And at the first sign of trouble in Tibet or Xinjiang, authorities cut off Internet and SMS services there. But after the 2008 Tibetan uprising, 2009 is becoming the year of the Uighur revolt, threatening to mar China's Oct. 1 fiesta. Unlike Iran's clerically controlled democracy, China holds no elections to elect its leaders, not even sham elections.

More broadly, the U.S. occupation of Iraq under the garb of spreading democracy as well as excesses like Guantanamo Bay and illegal CIA detention camps overseas had the effect of undermining the credibility of democratic values by turning them into geopolitical tactics.

The point is that liberal democratic norms, far from becoming universal, have come under attack at a time when a qualitative reordering of global power is empowering non-Western economies. That raises the possibility that, in the coming decades, economies driven by a fusion of autocratic politics and crony, state-guided capitalism could gain the upper hand.

A divide centered on political values will carry major implications for international relations because, as modern history attests, regime character can impede observance of global norms and rules. And even if democratic governments are not more wedded to peace than autocracies, it is well established that democracies rarely go to war with each other. Today, the main challenge to the global spread of democracy comes from the model blending political authoritarianism and state-steered capitalism together.

Brahma Chellaney, a professor of strategic studies at the privately funded Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, is the author, most recently, of "Asian Juggernaut: The Rise of China, India and Japan" (HarperCollins).

THE JAPAN TIMES SATURDAY, JULY 11, 2009

Why can't Obama realize his wars are unwinnable?

TED RALL

Portland Ore.

Robert McNamara, one of the "best and the brightest" technocrats behind the escalation of the Vietnam War, eventually came to regret his actions. But his public contrition, which included a book and a series of interviews for the documentary "The Fog of War," were greeted with derision.

"Mr. McNamara must not escape the lasting moral condemnation of his countrymen," editorialized The New York Times in 1995. "Surely he must in every quiet and prosperous moment hear the ceaseless whispers of those poor boys in the infantry, dying in the tall grass, platoon by platoon, for no purpose. What he took from them cannot be repaid by prime-time apology and stale tears, three decades late." McNamara's change of heart came 58,000 American and 2,000,000 Vietnamese lives too late. If the dead could speak, surely they would ask: Why couldn't you see then what you understand so clearly now? Why didn't you listen to the millions of experts, journalists and ordinary Americans who knew that death and defeat were certain?

Though Errol Morris' film served as *ipso facto* indictment, its title was yet a kind of justification. There is no "fog of war." There is only hubris, stubbornness and the psychological compartmentalization that allows a man to sign papers that will lead others to die before going home to play with his children.

McNamara is dead. U.S. President Barack Obama is his successor. Some call McNamara's life tragic. Tragedy-inducing is closer to the truth. Yes, he suffered guilt in his later years. "He wore the expression of a haunted man," wrote the author of his Times obituary. "He could be seen in the streets of Washington — stooped, his shirttail flapping in the wind — walking to and from his office a few blocks from the White House, wearing frayed running shoes and a thousand-yard stare."

But the men and women and boys and girls blown up by bombs and mines and impaled by bullets and maimed in countless ways deserve more vengeance than a pair of ratty Nikes. Neither McNamara nor President Lyndon Johnson nor the millions of Americans who were for the war merit understanding, much less sympathy. Now Obama is following the same doomed journey.

"We must try to put ourselves inside their skin and look at us through their eyes," McNamara warned long after the fact, speaking of "America's enemies" but really just about people — people who live in other countries. People whose countries possess reserves of natural gas (Vietnam) or oil (Iraq) or are situated between energy reserves and deep-sea ports where oil tankers dock (Afghanistan and Pakistan).

Obama is leaving 50,000 troops in Iraq after the war there is supposedly coming to an end. He's escalating the unjustifiable, unwinnable tragedy in Afghanistan — there are 68,000 U.S. troops there now, probably going up to 100,000 by next year — while spreading the conflict into Pakistan.

Why can't Obama imagine himself living in a poor village in Pakistan? Why can't he feel the anger and contempt felt by Pakistanis who hear pilotless drone planes buzzing overhead, firing missiles willy-nilly at civilians and guerrilla fighters alike, dispatched by a distant enemy too cowardly to put live soldiers and pilots in harm's way?

"We burned to death 100,000 Japanese civilians in Tokyo — men, women and children," McNamara said. "LeMay said, 'If we'd lost the war, we'd all have been prosecuted as war criminals.' And I think he's right. He — and I'd say I — were behaving as war criminals." Nine hundred thousand Japanese civilians died in all. At least Japan started the war.

What of Afghanistan and Iraq, where approximately 2 million civilians have been killed by U.S. forces? Neither country attacked the United States. Shouldn't former President George W. Bush, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the rest be prosecuted as war criminals? Why not Obama? After all, Obama is leaving 50,000 troops in Iraq after the war there is supposedly coming to an end. He's escalating the unjustifiable, unwinnable tragedy in Afghanistan — there are 68,000 U.S. troops there now, probably going up to 100,000 by next year — while spreading the conflict into Pakistan.

"Make no mistake, the international community is not winning in Afghanistan," concluded the Atlantic Council in 2008. Things have only gotten worse as U.S. troop presence has increased: more violence, more drugs, less reconstruction. Like McNamara, Obama doesn't understand a basic truth: you can't successfully manage an inherently doomed premise.

Colonialism is dead. Occupiers will never enjoy peace. Neither the Afghans nor the Iraqis nor the Pakistanis will rest until we withdraw our forces. The only success we will find is in accepting defeat sooner rather than later.

What went wrong [in Vietnam] was a basic misunderstanding or mis-evaluation of the threat to our security represented by the North Vietnamese," McNamara said in his Berkeley oral history."

Today's domino theory is Bush's (now Obama's) clash of civilizations, the argument that unless we fight them "there" we will have to fight them here. Afghanistan and Iraq don't present security threats to the U.S. The presence of U.S. troops and drone planes, on the other hand...

In fairness to McNamara, it only took two years for him to call to an end of the bombing of North Vietnam. By 1966 he was advising LBJ to start pulling back. But, like a gambler trying to recoup and justify his losses, the president kept doubling down. "We didn't know our opposition," concluded McNamara. "So the first lesson is know your opponents. I want to suggest to you that we don't know our potential opponents today." Actually, it's worse than that. Then, like now, we don't have opponents. We create them.

Ted Rall is a political cartoonist and writer.

THE JAPAN TIMES SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2009

It's up to the five powers to bottle the nuclear genie

GWYNNE DYER

London

Speaking in Moscow on July 7, U.S. President Barack Obama was the very soul of reasonableness. The United States and Russia must cooperate to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons, he said, while keeping the goal of a world without nuclear weapons always in sight: "America is committed to stopping nuclear proliferation, and ultimately seeking a world without nuclear weapons."

Unfortunately, that is the wrong way round. The deal that underpinned the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, signed way back in 1968, was that the five great powers who already had nuclear weapons would gradually get rid of them. In return, the rest of the world's countries would not make them at all. But more than 40 years later, none of those five countries (U.S., Russia, Britain, France and China) has kept its side of the deal.

Under the circumstances, it's remarkable that only four more countries have developed nuclear weapons. Three of them (Israel, India and Pakistan) never signed the treaty at all, and the fourth (North Korea) signed it in 1985, quit it in 2003 and then tested its first bomb in 2006. But the queue of those who are now thinking about doing it stretches down the block and around the corner.

"Any (treaty) . . . has to have a sense of fairness and equity, and it is not there," said Mohamed El-Baradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in an interview with the Guardian newspaper two months ago. "We still live in a world where if you have nuclear weapons, you are buying power, you are buying insurance against attack. That is not lost on those who do not have nuclear weapons, particularly in (conflict) regions."

It was probably the U.S. invasion of Iraq that made the North Koreans go nuclear. Finding yourself on President George W. Bush's shortlist for invasion (as part of the "axis of evil") is bound to be a bit unnerving. That may also explain why the Iranians put their nuclear program into high gear — although there is an ideological difficulty here.

Just last month, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, declared once again that "Nuclear weapons are religiously forbidden in Islam and Iranian people do not have such a weapon."

Since Khamenei is a religious scholar, we may presume that he is not lying when he says that nuclear weapons are forbidden in Islam. Ayatollahs do not trim their conclusions on such matters to suit the tactical needs of the moment.

So how does Khamenei reconcile this principle with the obvious fact that Iran is relentlessly developing all the technologies needed to build nuclear weapons? "Virtual nuclear weapons," of course. You get all the technologies and the enrichment facilities up and running, you continue to the point where you could build your first nuclear bomb in only a few months — and then you stop.

So far, all legal and morally correct, but if a hostile nuclear-armed country starts making open threats or secret preparations against you, you throw your legal and/or moral qualms out the window, quickly cover the remaining distance and presto! You have your own nuclear deterrent.

"This is the phenomenon we see now and what people worry about in Iran," said El-Baradei in May. "And this phenomenon goes much beyond Iran. Pretty soon . . . you will have nine weapons states and probably another 10 or 20 virtual weapons states."

It's legal because another part of the deal that underpinned the NPT gave all the signatories the right to develop nuclear power for peaceful purposes. Since the technologies for enriching nuclear materials for fuel in reactors are basically the same as those for enriching them to weapons grade — you just run the fissile material through the process many more times — every country has the right to become a virtual nuclear weapons power.

The only thing that can stop the rapid spread of nuclear weapons now, argues El-Baradei, is a genuine move by the existing nuclear powers to get rid of their weapons. If they finally kept their 40-year-old promise, it would change the whole psychology that drives the current wave of proliferation. Can they?

It has to start with the U.S. and Russia, who still own 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. The agreement that the U.S. and Russia signed in Moscow on July 6 doesn't begin to meet that requirement, proposing only that the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which must be signed by yearend, will reduce their long-range nuclear weapons by up to a third within seven years. That's not nearly enough.

But maybe they're just trying to lower expectations. Maybe, by the time they actually finish negotiating the treaty in December, it will decree 90 percent cuts within three or four years, leaving Russia and America with only enough nuclear weapons to destroy a couple of hundred cities each. That might be enough to turn the tide and stop the proliferation.

El-Baradei got it exactly right. If that is done before the NPT comes up for review next April, "you would have a completely different environment. All these so-called virtual weapons states . . . will think twice . . . because then the major powers will have the moral authority to go after them and say: 'We are doing our part of the bargain. Now it is up to you.' "

But the existing nuclear powers have to move first.

Gwynne Dyer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

THE JAPAN TIMES SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2009

A disappointing understanding

David Krieger
Santa Barbara Calif.

U.S. President Barack Obama raised expectations for achieving a world without nuclear weapons when he said in Prague on April 5, "I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons."

But he only succeeded in moving the world a very small fraction of the way toward this goal when he met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in Moscow on July 6 to announce the outcome thus far of U.S.-Russian negotiations on nuclear disarmament.

A joint understanding signed in Moscow by the two presidents gave little cause for celebration for those who share Obama's vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

Until now, the two presidents had not revealed the numbers they had in mind for nuclear arms reductions. The joint understanding, however, provided these numbers for the first time.

"Within seven years after this treaty comes into force, and in the future, the limits for strategic delivery systems should be within the range of 500 to 1,100 units and for warheads linked to them within the range of 1,500 to 1,675 units," the statement said.

These numbers cut the size of the strategic delivery systems by about a third and the deployed strategic warheads to just slightly below levels set by Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin in 2002.

The agreement deals only with strategic offensive weapons, making no provisions for nonstrategic or tactical weapons, which are left outside the count. These may prove to be the most worrisome and uncontrollable of the weapons. The agreement also makes no provisions for warheads held in storage. The two presidents dealt separately with missile defense forces in Europe, which the Russians have vehemently opposed, agreeing to carry out a joint threat assessment and make recommendations.

It is expected that the new arms agreement will be finalized before yearend and will replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), which expires Dec. 5. This means that the new numbers set forth in the joint understanding will not need to be achieved before 2016, which would coincide with the end of a potential second Obama administration.

In addition to the slow progress in reductions of warheads, the joint understanding also fails to deal with other important issues, such as the dangers of the weapons remaining on high-alert status, pledges of No First Use of the weapons, or a commitment to achieving a Nuclear Weapons Convention for the phased, verifiable, irreversible and transparent elimination of the weapons.

The joint understanding is a step in the right direction, but it is a far smaller step than might have been hoped. It is unlikely to indicate to the nonnuclear weapons states that the nuclear weapons states are fulfilling their obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty for good-faith negotiations leading to a world free of nuclear weapons.

Now that the numbers are revealed, it appears that the U.S. and Russia are not making major strides, but rather creeping, even reluctantly, toward Obama's vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons remain the only weapons that could destroy U.S. or Russian cities and threaten the future existence of the two countries.

Since neither U.S. nor Russian nuclear weapons can deter nonstate extremists, there is zero tolerance for these weapons getting into the hands of such extremist groups. It is highly unlikely that the level of reductions that they now envision can assure that these weapons will not end up in the hands of extremists committed to doing harm to either country or to other countries.

While surely this is only a first step in nuclear disarmament efforts by the two leaders, Obama needs to press harder for more serious reductions in nuclear arms, reductions that will be sufficient to bring the other nuclear weapons states to the table to collectively seek a world without nuclear weapons.

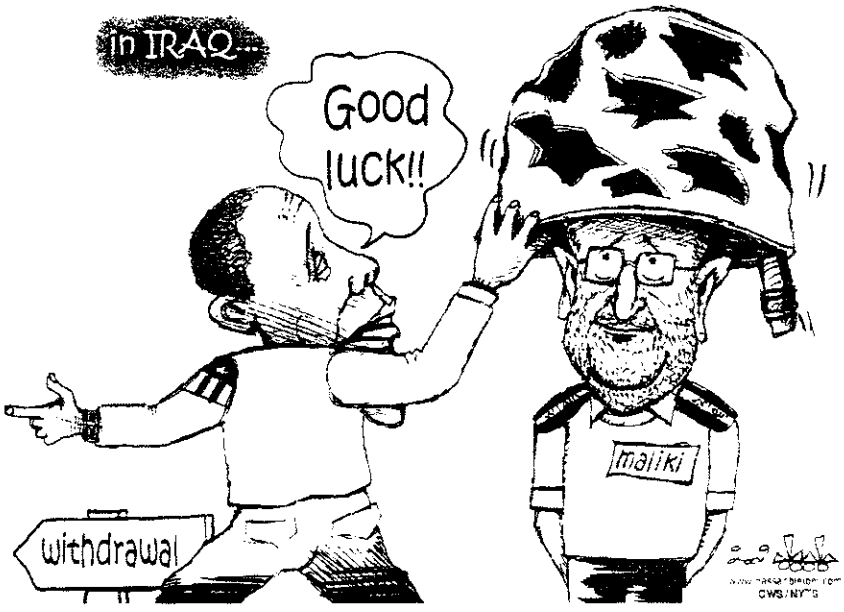
On the positive side, the two presidents are discussing tentative plans for a global nuclear summit in 2010. Such a summit would allow for additional perspectives, those from nuclear as well as nonnuclear weapons states, to be placed on the table for a larger discussion of nuclear threats and security.

David Krieger is president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (www.wagingpeace.org) and sits on the World Future Council.

THE JAPAN TIMES TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2009

Strategic drift of Obama for the 'Long War'

Andrew J. Bacevich
Boston
LOS ANGELES TIMES



"Are there not other alternatives than sending our armies to chew barbed wire in Flanders?" During the bitter winter of 1914-15, the first lord of the Admiralty posed this urgent question to Britain's prime minister.

The eighth anniversary of 9/11, now fast approaching, invites attention to a similar question: Are there not other alternatives than sending our armies to choke on the dust of Iraq and Afghanistan?

Back in December 1914, the Admiralty's impatient first lord was Winston Churchill, appalled by the slaughter on the Western Front. Intent on breaking the stalemate, Churchill became a font of ideas. Mired in Flanders? Then launch an amphibious assault against the Dardanelles, he urged. Were German machine guns cutting down British Tommies venturing into no man's land? Then support the infantry with tanks.

Yet Churchill's innovations failed to deliver a quick resolution. Instead, they prolonged the war and drove up its cost. When the guns finally fell silent in November 1918, "victory" left Britain economically and spiritually depleted. Revolution wracked much of Europe. And the seeds of totalitarianism had been planted, producing in their maturity an even more horrendous war. Some victory.

Churchill and his Cabinet colleagues had spent four years dodging fundamental questions. Fixated with tactical and operational concerns, they ignored matters of strategy and politics. Britain's true interest lay in ending the war — not in blindly seeing it through to the bitter end. This, few British leaders possessed the imagination to see.

A comparable failure of imagination besets present-day Washington. The Long War launched by George W. Bush in the wake of 9/11 has not gone well. Everyone understands that.

Yet in the face of disappointment, what passes for advanced thinking recalls the Churchill who devised Gallipoli and godfathered the tank. In Washington and in the field, a preoccupation with tactics and operations have induced strategic blindness.

As President Barack Obama shifts the main U.S. military effort from Iraq to Afghanistan, and as his commanders embrace counterinsurgency as the new American way of war, the big questions go not only unanswered but unasked. Does perpetuating the Long War make political or strategic sense? As we prepare to enter that war's ninth year, are there no alternatives?

Pragmatists shy away from first-order questions — recall the first President George Bush's aversion to "the vision thing." Obama is a pragmatist. Unlike his immediate predecessor, he inhabits a world where facts matter.

Yet pragmatism devoid of principle will perpetuate the strategic void that Obama inherited. The urgent need is for the administration to articulate a concrete set of organizing precepts — not simply cliches — to frame basic U.S. policy going forward.

What should those principles be?

- First, the Long War may be long, but it should not get any bigger. The regime-change approach — invade and occupy to transform — hasn't worked; simply trying harder in some other venue (Somalia? Sudan?) won't produce different results. In short, no more Iraqs.
- Second, forget the Bush Doctrine of preventive war: no more wars of choice; henceforth only wars of necessity. The U.S. will use force only as a last resort and even then only when genuinely vital interests are at stake.
- Third, no more crusades unless the American people buy in: expecting a relative handful of soldiers to carry the load while the rest of the country binges on consumption is unconscionable. At a minimum, the generation that opts for war should pay for it through higher taxes rather than foisting a burden of debt onto their grandchildren.
- Fourth, the key to keeping America safe is to defend it, not to project American muscle to obscure places around the world. It may or may not be true that a "mighty fortress is our God": had the U.S. been a mighty fortress on 9/11, however, the 19 hijackers would have gotten nowhere.
- Fifth, by all means let the U.S. promote the spread of freedom and democracy. Yet we're more likely to enjoy success by modeling freedom rather than trying to impose it. To provide a suitable model, we've considerable work to do here at home. Meanwhile, let's not deny others the prerogative of defining for themselves exactly what it means to be free.

Now, some may view these principles as inadequate. Fair enough: Come up with something better. The point is that unless we get the fundamentals right — and we haven't since the Cold War ended — the U.S. may yet share the fate suffered by Churchill's Britain, reduced from engine to caboose in the course of his own political career. Those are the consequences of strategic drift.

Obama has appointed czars for a host of issues, his administration today employing more czars than have occupied the Kremlin throughout its history. Yet there is no czar for strategy. This most crucial portfolio remains unassigned.

That's unacceptable. Obama needs to appoint someone to fill the position — or he could claim it for himself.

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Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

Malaysia's Anwar confident opposition will survive

By: AFP
Published: 1/07/2009 at 11:58 AM

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who faces trial this month on sodomy charges, said his Pakatan Rakyat alliance would survive even if he is convicted and jailed.Anwar has rejected the allegations levelled by a 23-year-old former aide as a conspiracy to derail his plan to topple the government.He was found guilty of separate sodomy and corruption charges a decade ago in a case widely seen as politically motivated. In 2004 the sodomy conviction was overturned, allowing Anwar to go free after six years in jail.

"There is no question of the Pakatan Rakyat continuing, surviving. It will continue to defend the rights of the people and challenge the government, gaining strength from any conviction made against me," Anwar told AFP."In fact I think a conviction against me will enrage a lot of people," he said after a political rally late Tuesday."I am ready for all eventualities and prepared to face attacks -- expect the best and prepare for the worst."

Anwar addressed a crowd of more than 2,000 supporters in a stadium outside the capital in a three-hour rally organised by his opposition alliance to show their solidarity for him.Anwar's Keadilan party has joined forces with the conservative Islamic party PAS and the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party in an alliance which gained unprecedented ground against the ruling coalition in national polls a year ago.

After seizing control of a third of seats in parliament, it is now vowing to unseat the Barisan Nasional coalition -- which has ruled Malaysia for half a century -- in the next general elections.However, Anwar's political success story has faced a formidable challenge with fresh sodomy allegations that could see him jailed for 20 years.The sex act, even between consenting adults, is illegal in predominantly Muslim Malaysia. Anwar's trial will begin on July 8 and he has already said he fears he will not get fair treatment.Anwar served as deputy prime minister for the Barisan Nasional until he was sacked in 1998 and jailed for sodomy and corruption.

Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

Defining options beyond emergency rule

By: VITIT MUNTARBHORN
Published: 1/07/2009 at 12:00 AM
Newspaper section: News

The southern provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat continue to grab headlines with almost daily incidents of violence causing untold suffering for the local people and instability for the region and beyond.Decapitation and a slew of other ugly incidents against both Muslims and Buddhists in these predominantly Muslim provinces inflict not only physical damage, but also psychological scars which have inter-generational and inter-community impact.

Ill-intentioned elements - at times insurgent, at times uniformed - are trying to "religionise" the conflict, even though the origins of the conflict can be traced back to age-old cultural insensitivity and prejudices, economic marginalisation, political heavy-handedness and mal-administration, with a fractious historical backdrop.

So far, the reaction from the State has been based upon the imposition of emergency rule on the deep South. This is manifest by the use of various emergency laws, particularly in Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat provinces and parts of Songkhla, and the predominance of uniformed law enforcers governing the South.The testy question behind all this is whether this approach has worsened rather than improved the situation.

In effect, the two main laws operating now are the Martial Law Act and the State of Emergency Decree. They are supplemented by the Criminal and Criminal Procedure Codes and last year's Internal Security Act. These give enormous powers to the authorities to take action against what they perceive to be negative elements - indeed, almost unbridled powers.

Under the Martial Law Act, the authorities can arrest a person without a warrant for one week, as a kind of preventive detention. Under the State of Emergency Decree, it is possible to arrest someone for questioning for up to 30 days, subject to the issuance and extension of warrants (every seven days) from the courts.

The period of detention can be extended for up to 84 days under the Criminal Procedure Code in the case of serious offences. These are further concretised by various orders issued by the authorities to those under their command to specify the type of treatment to be accorded to those taken in for questioning pending a court trial.Various anomalies have arisen in the application of these laws. First, until quite recently, those taken in for questioning were not allowed to see their relatives even during the first three days of

being detained - a critical period, especially as instances of torture, if and when they take place, often take place during the first few days of detention.

This situation has been rectified to some extent, with the help of the more insightful officials; at present, in most cases, there is access to families even in the first three days. Second, there is still no access to lawyers in the first three days of a person being detained. This results, in part, from the interpretation of the Constitution and related laws which only guarantees access to lawyers for accused persons (pou tongha). However, those taken in for questioning under these emergency laws are not considered to be accused persons - they are merely classified as persons "helping the authorities" and are subjected to questioning, pending full court hearings.

Third, there is the complaint that the information obtained from such questioning is used to obtain multiple arrest warrants against the same person. Thus, at the moment of a person being released from detention under one arrest warrant, the person may be rearrested under another arrest warrant using the information derived from the initial questioning, with possible changes in the charges lodged against the detained person.

Fourth, bail is not easy to obtain for cases which are deemed to be security-related.Fifth, sensitive trials are moved from the province where the alleged crimes took place - to be heard by a court in a more distant province, thus making it difficult for the witnesses and families of the accused to have access to those being tried by the court.

Sixth, the courts have been willing to issue warrants to extend the detention of persons for questioning by the authorities under the Emergency Decree, without demanding that the persons be produced in court to ensure that they are truly safe and well treated by the detaining authorities (habeas corpus).

Adding salt to the wound, there is the fact that the families of those taken in for questioning suffer economic deprivation as a result, and there arises the question whether they are adequately protected against threats and intimidation.

Human rights defenders involved in helping persons in such difficulties are similarly at risk. There is also the critique that court hearings concerning security cases are slow, although this would seem to be due to the lack of availability of defence lawyers trusted by accused persons, rather than the judicial process itself.

In fairness, it should be noted that uniformed persons, particularly at the higher echelons, have embraced the vocabulary of justice, rule of law and human rights more openly and explicitly, although, of course, the real test is in the implementation. There are orders to those under their command that in the case of violations, disciplinary and other actions will be taken against personnel involved in such violations.

The situation in a key military camp down South now looks more transparent, with improved respect for human rights and only short periods of detention, prior to the detained persons being transferred to official prisons pending court trials. Non-

governmental organisations now report that the violations tend to take place at the field level and the localities, rather than in the camp. Deserving attention is the role of the police, army rangers and armed defence volunteers.

Even though, arguably, the grass seems to be a little greener here and there, the spate of recent incidents noted above highlights the impunity of the wrongdoers, and the increasing unreliability of state organs in protecting people from harm - in the eyes of the public. There is increasing diffidence felt by the local people towards the authorities, with an escalating sense of scepticism, if not cynicism, towards to various pillars of the State.

If people are no longer able to rely on the State to guarantee their safety, to whom should they turn? The psychological chasm is widening and the political schism is broadening.

A possible option for political leaders in the country is now to move towards other measures beyond emergency rule. If the latter is lifted, the authorities already have at their fingertips the new Internal Security Act. This law also provides them with broad powers to deal with security-related situations, with the Prime Minister at the top and the Cabinet having a say in the process. The chain of command will be shifted from the military (under the emergency rule) to civilian oversight, with military, police and other state authorities as part of the internal security command structure. However, even with this option, there should be no complacency as the Internal Security Act may also be seen as conferring too broad powers on the authorities. For instance, the law does not adequately stipulate that constraints on the exercise of rights and liberties must not be arbitrary and must be proved to be necessary, proportional to the circumstances and consistent with democracy and international law. Nor does it integrate international standards adequately into the text - such as the need to prohibit torture absolutely and to ensure expeditious access to the courts and fair trial.

While the current debate revolves around whether to create a special administrative zone for the South, the real options which have yet to be responded to adequately can be summarised as five-fold.- First, the need to underline justice and human rights, especially to counter the impunity factor and to guarantee that justice is done and is seen to be done.- Second, the need to decentralise power to the provinces, such as through having more southerners in the bureaucracy and to have forums where power can be shared.

- Third, the need for more people's participation, such as through public hearings and inquiries on the political and other processes to attain peace and broad-based representation.- Fourth, the need to concretise political dialogue with political leaders and other representatives from the communities in a spirit of democracy and respect for cultural diversity.

- Fifth, the need to use resources wisely and to respect local resources, especially to ensure that the State resources allocated to the South access local people effectively and are not overwhelmed by inter-agency competition to control those resources for other purposes, while enabling the utilisation and conservation of local resources to be decided upon by the local people.

In truth, the vicious cycle of violence can and should be broken by enlightened and exemplary leadership which explores people-centred options, opening up the space for all constituencies and constituents, with civilian solutions at the helm, aimed at the "inclusivity" of all.

- *Vitit Muntarbhorn is a Professor of Law at Chulalongkorn University. He has helped the UN in a variety of capacities, including as an expert, consultant and Special Rapporteur.*

Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

NKorea warns Japan against inspecting cargo ships

By: AFP
Published: 1/07/2009 at 12:58 PM

North Korea has warned of military action against Japan if Tokyo stops its vessels for cargo inspections.Rodong Sinmun, official daily of the ruling communist party, said Tokyo is pushing for a new law to authorise tougher cargo inspections in search of banned weapons."Our ships are sacred and impregnable places where our sovereignty reigns. If anyone hurts them, it would be considered a grave military provocation against us," Rodong said in a commentary.

"This kind of action will immediately meet with our self-defensive military actions and the responsibility for all consequences will rest with Japan."The paper accused Tokyo of tightening sanctions against the North under the pretext of implementing a United Nations Security Council resolution, in order to "create a legal atmosphere for the use of military force" against Pyongyang.

"It is Japan's calculation that tightened sanctions and increased pressure and blockade against the DPRK (North Korea) would either bring the DPRK into submission or help create a war atmosphere as desired by it," Rodong said.The Security Council on June 12 tightened sanctions against the North in response to its latest nuclear test.It authorised member states to request cargo inspections to intercept banned shipments related to the North's nuclear or missile programmes.Japan separately on June 16 banned all exports to North Korea.

The North Korean government's official daily, Minju Joson, also accused Japan of taking advantage of nuclear and missile "threats" in order "to shake off legal restraints" on its desire to project military power overseas.Japan imposed harsh colonial rule over the Korean peninsula from 1910-45. North Korea frequently accuses it of trying to revive its 20th century militarism.A North Korean ship tracked by the US Navy and suspected of transporting weapons or military know-how in violation of UN sanctions has turned around, a Pentagon official said.

The official declined to provide details, including where the Kang Nam 1 ship -- reportedly originally bound for Burma -- could now be headed, but news reports out of South Korea suggested the ship may be returning home two weeks after it set sail June 17.A diplomatic source speaking on condition of anonymity told the Korea Herald that the ship was "near our waters," which could suggest that sanctions were having an effect on reclusive North Korea.Japanese police said Tuesday they had arrested three men for allegedly trying to sell a device to Burma that can be used in missile production.It said the men were acting on the orders of a company linked to North Korea.

Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

India sets up regional base for anti-terror troops

By: AFP
Published: 1/07/2009 at 08:58 AM

India's first regional unit for specialist anti-terror troops has opened in Mumbai, fulfilling a government pledge after criticisms of the military's slow response to last year's attacks on the city.The hub for some 250 National Security Guard (NSG) commandos, opened by Home Minister P. Chidambaram on Tuesday evening, is the first of four new centres across the country.The others in Kolkata, eastern India, and the southern cities of Chennai and Hyderabad open on Wednesday.

Security officials say the new base -- temporarily housed near Mumbai's international airport until a permanent facility nearby is operational next year -- will reduce incident response times drastically.But security analysts said India still has a long way to go to improve its counter-terrorism capabilities, despite an increase in defence spending since last year.Ajai Sahni, editor of the South Asian Intelligence Review and executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi, described the regional NSG units as a "token" response.

"Any terrorist attack realises its potential within the first few minutes," he told AFP."If you have a unit in north Mumbai and south Mumbai is attacked, in the 45 minutes to two hours it takes to get there, the terrorists have already done their worst."Better training and equipment for India's overstretched and under-funded local police to help them contain the situation as the first line of defence would be a more viable option, he added."We're still committed to the 'Rambo' model. We think a handful of strong, well-trained men can take on the world. That might happen in films but it's nonsense in reality," he added.

Nicknamed the "Black Cats", the NSG is modelled on the British Army's elite Special Air Service (SAS) and the GSG-9, the specialist operations unit of the German police.The Indian government recommended setting up regional units after the November 26-29 Mumbai attacks, which saw 10 Islamist extremist gunmen kill 166 people and injure more than 300 others in a 60-hour killing spree.NSG troops only arrived in India's financial capital on the morning of November 27 -- some 10 hours after the first shots were fired.

Counter-terrorism experts say that any rapid reaction force should be on the scene with 30 to 60 minutes.The slow response was blamed on organisational and logistical difficulties in getting commandos from their base south of Delhi to Mumbai, as the NSG has no aircraft of its own.Praveen Swami, a terrorism analyst and associate editor at The Hindu English-language newspaper, said the new regional units were "a welcome but very, very small step"."It's at the sharp end that there's a real problem, the mundane, every day point of delivery," he told AFP.

"When you have these large terrorist attacks, the real problem is not getting the special units in, it's been the first responders, the police and other emergency services, being able to deal with it."State governments were slowly realising the need to improve local policing, after a wave of Islamist extremist attacks across India last year, he added.

In Maharashtra, of which Mumbai is the capital, nearly 300 commandos are currently being trained for the state's new counter-terrorism unit, called Force One.Meanwhile, five special squads of 200 Mumbai Police officers -- all trained to use AK-47 assault rifles and equipped with bullet-proof jackets and vehicles -- are to be stationed across the city as a rapid response force.But problems remain: neither the 40,000-strong Mumbai Police -- responsible for a city of 18 million -- nor the NSG has its own helicopters for the quick transportation of officers and troops.

Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

North Korea suspect ship has turned around: US official

By: AFP
Published: 1/07/2009 at 05:58 AM

A North Korean ship tracked by the US Navy and suspected of transporting weapons or military know-how in violation of UN sanctions has turned around, a Pentagon official said.The official declined to provide details, including where the Kang Nam 1 ship -- reportedly originally bound for Burma -- could now be headed, but news reports out of South Korea suggested the ship may be returning home two weeks after it set sail June 17.

A diplomatic source speaking on condition of anonymity told the Korea Herald that the ship was "near our waters," which could suggest that sanctions were having an effect on reclusive North Korea."If the ship is on its way back, it would mean that Resolution 1874 is taking effect and causing the North to retreat," Kim Tae-woo, vice president of the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, told the newspaper.

The Kang Nam 1 quickly drew the attention of the US military under new UN sanctions designed to punish Pyongyang over its May 25 underground nuclear test.The US ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, confirmed Sunday that the United States was tracking the cargo ship."Obviously we're pursuing and following the progress of that ship very closely," she told the CBS network.

"I'm not going to get into our operational details or what we might actually do on the high seas, if anything, or what allies and partners in the region might do."UN Security Council Resolution 1874, adopted in response to the May 25 nuclear test, calls for beefed up inspections of air, sea and land shipments going to and from North Korea, and an expanded arms embargo.

But a senior US lawmaker, Senate Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, last week said the resolution had "serious limitations" because it rules out the use of military force to back up the searches.

Bangkok Post 2.0 BETA The world's window to Thailand

Teacher, friend shot dead in Narathiwat

By: POST REPORTERS
Published: 1/07/2009 at 12:00 AM
Newspaper section: News

A religious teacher and his friend are the latest fatalities in suspected insurgency violence in the South after they were shot dead in Narathiwat's Rangae district.Police said the attack took place on Monday night as Abdulloza Baha, 25, an "ustad" or religious teacher, and his friend, Yago Samae, 19, were returning home from a religious class. Abdulloza was a classmate of the suspected insurgency leader Masae Useng, who has a 5 million baht bounty on his head. Police believe a local militant group was behind the killings.

Educators and teachers from 78 schools in Narathiwat met yesterday to improve security for teachers, following widespread rumours that militant groups were plotting to kill around 50 women teachers. The teachers were reminded at the meeting to be on guard and strictly adhere to security measures at all times, as failure to do so could cost them their lives. Director of Yala education zone 1 Attasit Rattanaklaew dismissed the plot rumours, despite the fact four women teachers have been killed in attacks since the rumours first spread.

Seven people were wounded yesterday afternoon in a bomb blast which followed a gun attack on an assistant manager of a public utilities office in Narathiwat's Waeng district.Police said the blast was intended to kill officers investigating the shooting.In Pattani, civic sector representatives, spiritual leaders and local administrators yesterday received legal training to support people who had been unjustly treated by the judicial process. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva yesterday said peace talks and a special administration under a constitutional form could be explored as alternative solutions to the unrest in the South.

But winning the hearts and minds of the people who have different ethnic and cultural identities required long-term and uninterrupted efforts to restore safety, justice and trust, Mr Abhisit told a seminar, organised by King Prajadhipok's Institute, Chulalongkorn University and Deep South Watch.The prime minister said people in the southern provinces and all Thais around the country needed to be patient if they wanted to see sustainable peace and stability through the measures the government is implementing.

Mr Abhisit said the southern conflict was rooted in historical ethnic and cultural clashes and it was impossible to provide a timeframe for a solution.He clarified the government's "politics guiding military" policy to quell the southern strife. All agencies needed to adjust their attitudes and working style, he said. Military forces have to be based in the South but special laws must be implemented only when clear evidence was gathered and the intelligence well-founded.

Bangkok Post 2.0 BETA The world's window to Thailand

Laws in South up for review

By: KING-OUA LAOHONG AND ABDULLOH BENJAKAT
Published: 2/07/2009 at 12:00 AM
Newspaper section: News

A new office is being set up to study the improvement of laws and judicial processes to better serve people in Muslim-dominated areas.The move is a new attempt by the government to ensure justice in the restive southern provinces where daily violence resulting in the loss of thousands of lives over the past five years is said to be rooted in unjust legal enforcement.Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva yesterday discussed the idea of establishing the office during a seminar on the understanding of legal proceedings involving insurgency cases.The role of the new office, to be under the Justice Ministry, would be to look into areas needed to improve laws including Islamic law so they would better apply to people in the far South.Islamic law has been used since 1946 in civil suits concerning families and inheritance among Thai Muslims, including those in the far South.Mr Abhisit said another emphasis of the office should be placed on fair law enforcement to ensure that nobody was above the law - even rogue authorities - and goes unpunished.

Misunderstandings between government officials and local people create a climate of distrust, so every effort would go into bridging that gap.Mr Abhisit said establishing the new institute was one of several courses of action. The integration of Islamic tenets and culture into the problem-solving process would also help regional peace.Deputy permanent secretary for justice Charnchao Chaiyanukit said specific laws would be piloted in selected communities on Oct 1, when the institute would be set up with funding from the 2011 fiscal budget, starting in October next year.National Security Council adviser Pirapong Manakij said the insurgency propaganda campaign based on a twisted view of the South's history and religious radicalism played a big part in shaping the way local people think.No matter how fair the judicial system was, criminal proceedings were not the final answer to restore peace in the South, he said.Human rights activist Somchai Homlaor said the peace process would get nowhere as long as genuine justice was not served.

He said the massacre at Krue Se mosque in Pattani in 2004, in a raid by security officials to take back the mosque from an insurgency group, was evidence of the failure of the government to deliver justice to people.As a result, people turned their backs on the central administration and gave support to militant groups, he said.Meanwhile, in Pattani, the body of Pvt 1st Class Krissada Iengla was flown yesterday to his home province of Loei for a funeral ceremony. Pvt 1st Class Krissada was killed in a bomb blast while carrying out a patrol to protect teachers on Tuesday.

Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

Somalia, Iraq most dangerous for minorities: NGO

By: AFP
Published: 2/07/2009 at 12:58 PM

Somalia remains the world's most dangerous country for minority groups, followed by Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan and Burma, a leading human rights group said.The five were in unchanged positions from last year's Minority Rights Group International's (MRG) list of countries where groups or peoples are most at risk of genocide, mass killing or other systematic violent repression.

In Somalia, the latest round of bloodletting in two decades of civil war kicked off in May when hardline Islamist groups launched a fresh offensive aimed at removing internationally-backed President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed.Meanwhile, the report says that despite a reduction in the violence, Iraq remained a highly dangerous place, with between 300 and 800 civilians a month still dying violently over the last year.

Since the last report, MRG says the situation has deteriorated in Pakistan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Georgia, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Niger, Kenya, and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.In Pakistan, the report says minorities are at particular risk from the fight against violent extremism, specifically the conflict between different Islamist groups in the northwest and tribal areas, repression of dissidents elsewhere and what it calls "growing violence in national politics".

MRG director Mark Lattimer said: "Ethnic and religious minorities across West Asia are under greater threat than ever before as a result of escalating military operations against Islamic extremists."Half the top 20 countries in the "Peoples under Threat 2009" report are African and six are in Asia.

Completing the top 10 are the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and the Palestinian territories, where the report said the war earlier this year in Gaza "leaves a continuing grave risk" to the lives of civilians."If the current push for peace led by the US administration and Arab states founders, there is a real risk of further radicalisation on both sides," it added.

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UN's Ban to meet Suu Kyi party members: spokesman

By: AFP
Published: 2/07/2009 at 12:58 PM

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is to meet senior members of the party of Aung San Suu Kyi when he visits Burma this week but has no plans yet to see the opposition leader, a party spokesman said.Ban is set to arrive in the military-ruled nation on Friday for a two-day visit focused on pressing the junta to release all political prisoners including the jailed Nobel peace laureate.

"The authorities informed us that five central executive committee members of the NLD (National League for Democracy) are to meet Mr Ban Ki-moon. We don't know details yet," NLD spokesman Nyan Win told AFP.He said the five did not include Aung San Suu Kyi, who is currently being held at the notorious Insein Prison in the commercial hub Rangoon where she is on trial for breaching the terms of her house arrest.

Nyan Win and other members of her legal team were due to meet her at the jail on Thursday, a day before her trial resumes.A Burma official speaking on condition of anonymity said that Ban would meet with members of 10 political parties including the NLD in the administrative capital Naypyidaw on Friday.Ban is also set to meet junta leader Senior General Than Shwe in Naypyidaw on the same day and is due to fly back to Rangoon on Saturday, officials said.

Aung San Suu Kyi, 64, faces up to five years in jail if convicted of the charges against her, which stem from a bizarre incident in May in which an American man, John Yettaw, swam uninvited to her lakeside house.Ban acknowledged this week that the visit was diplomatically risky as it coincides with the internationally condemned trial, but said that finding an appropriate time to come to Burma had been a challenge.Speaking in Tokyo on Tuesday, he urged Burma to release all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi and resume dialogue with opposition leaders.

The NLD leader has been in detention or under house arrest for most of the time since the junta refused to recognise her party's landslide victory in Burma's last elections, in 1990.Critics have accused the junta of using the trial to keep Aung San Suu Kyi locked up for elections that are due in 2010.

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Malaysia detains terror suspects: report

By: AFP
Published: 3/07/2009 at 02:58 PM

Malaysian police have detained three terror suspects under a tough security law for allegedly trying to revive the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) militant group here, according to a report.The trio, aged between 43 and 53, are believed to have met with Singaporean militant Mas Selamat bin Kastari, who was captured in Malaysia's south in April after escaping from detention in Singapore, the Star newspaper said.

Mas Selamat is said to be the head of the Singapore cell of JI, an underground group linked to Al-Qaeda and blamed for the 2002 Bali bombing and other bloody attacks in Southeast Asia."I confirm the arrests, but I cannot reveal anything further," police chief Musa Hassan told AFP. "They are arrested under the preventive laws."The news report said the three men, believed to be ordinary JI members, were picked up by police last week in southern Johor state after months of investigation.

It said an investigation was under way into whether they recruited any more members in recent months.Rights groups condemned the arrests, made under the Internal Security Act (ISA), which allows for indefinite detention without trial."We completely condemn the arrests and demand the detainees be put on trial or release (them) immediately," the Abolish ISA Movement coordinator E. Nalini said in a statement.

The ISA, which dates back to the British colonial era, when it was used against communist insurgents, has been used against suspected terrorists as well as government opponents.Prior to the latest arrests, the Home Ministry said in parliament last week that there are 12 people being held under the ISA for alleged militant activities and falsifying documents. Half of them are foreigners.The 12 were among 100 people who have been detained under the security law since 2004, according to the ministry.

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Japan hails choice of Amano as atomic watchdog chief

By: AFP
Published: 3/07/2009 at 02:58 PM

Japan welcomed the choice of Yukiya Amano as the next head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, stressing that he comes from the only country to have been attacked by atom bombs.The veteran Japanese diplomat won the contest in Vienna on Thursday to lead the UN nuclear watchdog, giving him a pivotal role in dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions.

"It is very significant that the head was selected from the only atomic-bombed country," top government spokesman Takeo Kawamura told reporters, noting that Amano's selection also boosted Japan's international profile."We hope he will make the IAEA fully perform its role when nuclear disarmament is being called into question," Kawamura said.

Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone said Japan would support Amano in various ways but stopped short of saying whether this would include financial aid to the body.Japan suffered US atomic bomb attacks on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the closing days of World War II in August 1945. The nation surrendered a few days after the attacks.

Hiroshima Major Tadatoshi Akiba also welcomed Amano's win."We have high hopes that he will work toward creating a concrete roadmap for abolishing nuclear weapons," Akiba said in a statement.

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UN chief outlines Burma vision in rare speech

By: AFP
Published: 4/07/2009 at 09:58 AM

UN chief Ban Ki-moon gave a rare public speech on Saturday outlining his vision for a democratic Burma, just hours after the ruling junta refused to let him meet opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.Ban told an audience of diplomats, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations that the military regime must free the pro-democracy icon and introduce other reforms for the good of the country's people."I am here today to say: Myanmar, you are not alone. We want to work with you for a united, peaceful, prosperous, democratic and modern Myanmar," Ban said at the Drug Elimination Museum in the commercial hub Rangoon. He used the ruling military regime's name for Burma throughout his visit.

"We want to help you rise from poverty ... work with you so that your country can take its place as a respected and responsible member of the international community," the secretary general said."But let me emphasise: neither peace nor development can thrive without democracy and respect for human rights. Myanmar is no exception."Junta chief Than Shwe earlier Saturday refused to let Ban visit Aung San Suu Kyi, who is in prison facing trial over an incident in which an American man swam uninvited to her lakeside house in May.Ban earlier described Than Shwe's snub as "deeply disappointing".

"I tried as hard as I could," he claimed, to press a request to the junta that all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, "should be released without delay"."The primary responsibility rests with the government to move the country toward its stated goals of national reconciliation and democracy," Ban said.

Burma was one of the first UN members to adopt its Declaration of Human Rights, he said, but added: "Unfortunately that commitment has not been matched in deed. [Burma's] human rights record remains a matter of grave concern."Ban also urged the junta to ensure that elections promised in 2010 should be free and fair. Critics say they will be a sham that will allow the ruling generals to entrench their power.

"The upcoming election, the first in 20 years, must be inclusive, participatory and transparent if it is to be credible," he said.The military regime refused to recognise the landslide victory of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy in Burma's last elections in 1990.

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Hundreds of separatists slain: Philippine military

By: AFP
Published: 4/07/2009 at 12:58 PM

More than a thousand Muslim rebels have been killed in the southern Philippines over the past year, despite the recovery of only 278 bodies, according to a military spokesman.Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Ponce also said he knew of only 22 soldiers killed in the fighting, despite claims by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that its rebels had killed 500 soldiers in its current offensive.

In August three MILF commanders broke a 2003 ceasefire and began attacking Christian communities in Mindanao, after the Supreme Court suspended a draft accord on Muslim self-rule in the southern Philippines.In Manila, armed forces spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Romeo Brawner earlier issued a statement saying that military fatalities against the rebels "do not even reach a hundred."

Speaking during a military patrol in Banasilan, in central Mindanao, Ponce pointed out MILF positions on hills in the distance.Despite having the MILF in their sights, Ponce told AFP, the military was not actively attacking the rebels."We are on a defensive stance. We are not conducting offensive operations. We are just conducting law-enforcement operations," he said.

The last gunbattle had been five days ago, although there had since been instances of bombs and mortar attacks, Ponce said."If the rogue MILF attacks civilian communities... that is the time we will do a counter-action," he said.International aid agencies say that more than half a million civilians have been displaced by the fighting that began in August.

Although many civilians have returned to their homes in recent weeks, several hundred still remain in evacuation centres due to fears of more MILF attacks, said Ponce.The 12,000-member MILF has been waging a separatist rebellion since 1978 to carve out an Islamic state in the southern part of the largely Catholic Philippines.

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The world's window to Thailand

After deal on African Authority, summit mulls Sudan warrant

By: AFP
Published: 4/07/2009 at 12:58 AM

Peacekeepers in Somalia and the war crimes warrant for Sudan's president dominated the final day of an African Union summit Friday, after a late-night compromise on a new regional Authority.Leaders of the 53-member bloc held marathon talks Thursday night to reach a pre-dawn deal on the Authority that will be tasked with coordinating defense, foreign relations and trade policies.

Despite relentless pressure from Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi, the current African Union chief, to grant the Authority broad influence over policy, the summit left the new body toothless to act without an explicit mandate from the member states.Kadhafi had hoped the AU's new executive authority would mark a major step toward his dreamed "United States of Africa," but the continent's biggest economy South Africa, as well as top oil producers Nigeria and Angola, won out with their insistence on a more gradual approach to integration.

"There are some small steps towards consultations and common African policy positions, but those who want to go slowly came out ahead," said one minister who participated in the talks.The 53 member states still must ratify the changes, meaning the African Union still has a long wait to see the existing AU Commission transformed into the Authority.The compromise settled the most contentious debate at the summit, but the 24 leaders who came to Kadhafi's hometown of Sirte still must tackle the thorny question of how to react to the war crimes indictment of Sudan's President Omar al-Beshir.

Thirty African countries are parties to the statutes that created the International Criminal Court.A draft text backed by Libya would force them to refuse to arrest Beshir if he visits their territory, as required under their treaty obligations to the court.Even some supporters of the court say they do not want to arrest Beshir for fear of creating a power vacuum in Khartoum and undermining the peace process in Darfur, where he is accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity."That would create problems that we cannot control. The African Union has peacekeepers there," said one delegate from a country that is party to the ICC.

Others are arguing that each country should be allowed to make its own decision, saying the African Union should not dictate to its members whether to adhere to the ICC treaty.The summit was also considering a raft of conflicts roiling the continent, most dramatically in Somalia, where Islamist insurgents launched an offensive against the internationally backed government nearly two months ago.The African Union has 4,300 peacekeepers deployed in Somalia, its largest force on the continent. But their role is confined largely to protecting the president and ensuring that key sea and airports remain open.

Somalia and five of its neighbours want the AU to deploy a total of 8,000 peacekeepers, a contingent that has already been approved but not yet manned.The leaders were moving toward an agreement on bolstering the peacekeeping force and strengthening the Somali police, while Eritrea came under pressure for allegedly harbouring extremists with ties to al-Qaeda who are fueling the unrest in Somalia."They have impressed upon Eritrea to be more responsive," not only to the conflict on the ground in Somalia but also with the growing problem of piracy off the coast, one southern African minister said after the talks.

"They are coming to the point that the problem has to be resolved inland and not in the water."As the talks dragged into the evening, Kadhafi proposed hosting a new summit around September 1, the date that he took power 40 years ago, the AU commissioner for peace and security Ramtane Lamamra said.

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Burmese lament UN chief's failure

By: AFP
Published: 5/07/2009 at 02:58 PM

Burma's opposition party said Sunday Ban Ki-moon's failure to meet its imprisoned leader Aung San Suu Kyi was a "great loss" as the UN chief left the military-ruled nation empty-handed. The UN Secretary General said he was "deeply disappointed" as he left Burma following his two-day visit, during which the ruling junta snubbed his attempts to visit the pro-democracy icon.Ban departed with a stern rebuke for the military ruler Than Shwe, saying the reclusive general had missed an opportunity to show the regime's commitment to implementing democratic reform and to holding free elections in 2010.

But his failure to extract even the smallest concession from the iron-fisted regime plays into the hands of critics, who warned him against visiting while Aung San Suu Kyi faces an internationally condemned trial."Mr Ban Ki-moon did not work as he intended during his visit," said Nyan Win, spokesman for the Nobel Peace Laureate's National League for Democracy (NLD)."Failing to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was important. We would like to say it was a great loss for him."But we do not want to say his trip was a failure as we do not know in detail what he discussed with Senior General Than Shwe," he added.

Burma's state media said Sunday that while Than Shwe said he "would like" to have arranged a meeting between Ban and Aung San Suu Kyi, the UN chief's requests were refused because of her current trial at Insein prison in Rangoon.Than Shwe told Ban "that the case is being heard freely and fairly, so they have no right to arrange a meeting between the UNSG (secretary general) and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi", according to The New Light of Burma newspaper.Aung San Suu Kyi is charged with breaching the terms of her house arrest after a US man swam uninvited to her lakeside house in May. Ban had hoped to secure her release and that of Burma's estimated 2,100 political prisoners.

He defended himself against criticisms that his trip was fruitless, saying that the junta chief only rejected his request to meet Aung San Suu Kyi.His meetings with Than Shwe had allowed him to convey "very frankly" the international community's concerns about Burma's progress towards democracy, he added.Rights groups and analysts warned however that the junta could use the high-profile visit as a way of showing that it was listening to international concerns -- while doing nothing about them.

"They (Burma's ruling generals) brought Ban Ki-moon for public relations purposes," said Zarni, a Burma analyst at the London School of Economics who goes by only one name.In London, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown raised the prospect of further sanctions against Burma following Ban's visit while US President Barack Obama has called the case against Aung San Suu Kyi a "show trial".The opposition leader has been either jailed or under house arrest for 13 of the last 19 years since the junta refused to recognise the NLD's victory in Burma's last elections, in 1990.

Critics have accused the junta of using her trial as an excuse to keep her locked up for next year's polls. They also say the elections are a sham designed to entrench the generals' power.In a rare public speech to hundreds of diplomats and aid workers in the commercial hub Rangoon before departing late Saturday, Ban outlined his vision for a democratic Burma."I am here today to say: Burma, you are not alone. We want to work with you for a united, peaceful, prosperous, democratic and modern Burma," he said, adding that the elections should be free, fair and inclusive.

The New Light of Burma said Than Shwe assured Ban: "The government will hold fair elections in 2010. Necessary laws, regulations and procedures are being drafted to be completed in time."Plans have been made for everyone to participate in the election," it added.Burma, formerly known as Burma, has been ruled by the military since 1962.

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SKorea military on watch for NKorea missile launch

By: AFP
Published: 5/07/2009 at 11:58 AM

South Korea's military was on watch for further tests after North Korea launched seven ballistic missiles in a show of firepower which earned international criticism.The missiles -- which the North is banned from firing under UN resolutions -- were launched into the Sea of Japan (East Sea) Saturday in an act of defiance apparently timed for the US Independence Day holiday.They further fuelled regional tensions after its nuclear test in May."There are no signs of preparations for additional missile launches today as yet but we are closely watching," a defence ministry spokesman told AFP.

The launches came as Washington seeks support for tough enforcement of United Nations sanctions aimed at shutting down Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programmes.It was the biggest salvo of ballistic weaponry since the North fired a long-range Taepodong-2 and six smaller missiles on US Independence Day in 2006.Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said they had a range of between 400 and 500 km (250-310 miles) but declined to say what type they were. Yonhap news agency said they were either Scuds, or Rodong-1 missiles whose maximum range of 1,300 km had been shortened.

The North on Thursday test-fired four short-range missiles with a range of 120 km into the Sea of Japan.Saturday's launches were seen as more provocative since the missiles could potentially reach most of South Korea, and possibly parts of Japan.The North has also apparently improved the accuracy of its missiles, an unidentified official told Yonhap, with five out of the seven hitting the target area after travelling about 450 km."Our analysis showed North Korea has improved the accuracy of its missiles," the official said.

"Three of the seven missiles fired had an unusually high velocity that makes us believe they could have been Rodong missiles that had their flight distance shortened," the official was quoted as saying.The North has about 600 Scuds, plus 200 Rodong-1 missiles which could reach Tokyo.The US State Department, in what was seen by analysts as a mild response, urged Pyongyang not to "aggravate tensions" and called the launches "not helpful".

Seoul's foreign ministry said the "provocative act... clearly violates" three UN Security Council resolutions, including the latest one on June 12 which toughened weapons-related sanctions on the North in response to its May 25 nuclear test.In a statement Saturday the ministry expressed "deep regret over North Korea's continued acts to escalate tensions in Northeast Asia".Britain, France and Japan condemned the latest launches.

"It is a serious act of provocation against the security of neighbouring countries, including our country," Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura said.Professor Kim Yong-Hyun of Seoul's Dongguk University said the launches were clearly timed to coincide with US Independence Day."This is a thinly veiled warning to the United States and the international community that it may launch long-range missiles next time," he told AFP.

Yonhap, however, quoted authorities as saying there is no sign of an imminent long-range missile launch.North Korea has made a series of bellicose moves this year.US and South Korean officials believe ailing leader Kim Jong-Il, 67, is staging a show of strength to bolster his authority as he tries to put in place a succession plan involving his youngest son Jong-Un.

A long-range rocket launch on April 5 was followed by the nuclear test -- the second since 2006 -- on May 25.In the days after its atomic test, Pyongyang fired six short-range missiles, renounced the truce in force on the Korean peninsula for half a century and threatened possible attacks on Seoul.

Bangkok Post 2.0 BETA The world's window to Thailand

CIA chief meets Philippine president

By: AFP
Published: 12/07/2009 at 02:59 PM

US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director Leon Panetta has met Philippine President Gloria Arroyo for a closed-door security meeting, officials have said.Panetta was escorted by Filipino Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo as they arrived at the Malacanang presidential palace, officials said.There were no immediate details on what transpired, but Arroyo's chief aide, Eduardo Ermita, earlier said the visit was to re-affirm Washington's commitment to its Southeast Asian anti-terror partner.

Panetta's visit came just hours after Al Qaeda-linked Islamic militants freed an Italian Red Cross worker they had held for six months in the southern Philippines.It also came just days after a series of bomb attacks in the south blamed on another group of Muslim separatist rebels left at least eight dead and over a hundred wounded.US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director Leon Panetta met Philippine President Gloria Arroyo on Sunday for a closed-door security meeting, officials said.Panetta was escorted by Filipino Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo as they arrived at the Malacanang presidential palace, officials said.

There were no immediate details on what transpired, but Arroyo's chief aide, Eduardo Ermita, earlier said the visit was to re-affirm Washington's commitment to its Southeast Asian anti-terror partner.Panetta's visit came just hours after Al Qaeda-linked Islamic militants freed an Italian Red Cross worker they had held for six months in the southern Philippines.It also came just days after a series of bomb attacks in the south blamed on another group of Muslim separatist rebels left at least eight dead and over a hundred wounded.The Foreign Department in a statement said Arroyo has meanwhile accepted an invitation to visit the White House on July 30, becoming the first Southeast Asian leader to have an audience with President Barack Obama.

Arroyo's visit "is an affirmation of the strong partnership between the two countries that share historical and cultural ties and common democratic values," the department said in a statement.Apart from joint counter-terrorism efforts, Arroyo is expected to discuss with Obama her government's poverty alleviation and economic programmes, it said.A senior department official, who asked not to be named, said the two leaders would discuss bilateral defence, security, economic and political issues.Diplomatic ties were strained after a US Marine who had participated in joint manoeuvres in the Philippines was convicted of raping a Filipino woman in 2006.

An appeals court overturned the decision early this year after the victim recanted her statement.US troops have been rotating in the southern Philippines since 2003 for joint anti-terror training with their Filipino counterparts.

Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

China blast: Terrorism ruled out

By: AFP
Published: 12/07/2009 at 12:59 PM

An oil tank explosion at a chemical plant in China's restive Urumqi city was not due to terrorism, the factory's vice manager has said, one week after ethnic unrest left more than 180 people dead."We have ruled out terrorism," Liu Jiyuan said at the factory, which belongs to China National Petroleum Corporation, the nation's biggest energy producer.The company said there were no casualties in the blast, which occurred in the northeast of Urumqi, the capital of China's northwest Xinjiang region.

"According to preliminary investigations, no one was hurt or killed at the scene, and human causes have been ruled out," a statement issued by the factory said.Smoke was seen Sunday morning coming out of a light oil storage tank at the plant, and firefighters extinguished the blaze 40 minutes later, according to the statement.The company was investigating the exact reason for the blast, it said, which comes at a sensitive time in Urumqi, one week after unrest between Muslim Uighurs and Han Chinese left 184 people dead and over 1,000 injured.

Members of the Uighur minority took to the streets and attacked Han Chinese last Sunday, according to victims and witnesses AFP spoke with here.However exiled Uighur leaders insist Uighur protests were peaceful until security forces over-reacted with deadly force, and that further deaths have occurred following Sunday's unrest.Thousands of Han Chinese early in the week then took to the streets of Urumqi wielding knives, poles, meat cleavers and other makeshift weapons, vowing vengeance against the Uighurs.

The mobs attacked some Uighurs, but the extent of the violence appeared not nearly as great as on July 5, with a massive security presence separating Han from Uighur.Xinjiang's eight million Uighurs make up nearly half the population of the region, and have long complained of repression and discrimination under Chinese rule.But Beijing insists its rule in Xinjiang is fair, and that it has brought economic prosperity to the region.

Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

Al-Qaeda vows to hit China over Uighur unrest

By: AFP
Published: 14/07/2009 at 02:59 PM

Al-Qaeda is threatening for the first time to attack Chinese interests overseas in retaliation for the deaths of Muslims in the restive region of Xinjiang, according to a risk analysis group.The call for reprisals against China comes from the Algerian-based offshoot Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), according to a summary of its report sent to AFP by the international consultancy Stirling Assynt."Although AQIM appear to be the first arm of Al-Qaeda to officially state they will target Chinese interests, others are likely to follow," said the report, which was first divulged by the South China Morning Post Tuesday.

Osama bin Laden's network has not previously threatened China, but the Stirling report said a thirst for vengeance over Beijing's clampdown in Xinjiang was spreading over the global jihadist community.Hundreds of thousands of Chinese work in the Middle East and North Africa, including 50,000 in Algeria, estimated the group, which has offices in London and Hong Kong providing risk advice to corporate and official clients."This threat should be taken seriously," Stirling said, basing its information on people who it said had seen the AQIM instruction.

"There is an increasing amount of chatter ... among jihadists who claim they want to see action against China."Some of these individuals have been actively seeking information on China's interests in the Muslim world, which they could use for targeting purposes."Stirling said the extremist group could well target Chinese projects in Yemen in a bid to topple the Beijing-friendly government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.The intelligence firm also noted Al-Qaeda's killing of 24 Algerian security officers who were meant to be protection for Chinese engineers three weeks ago.

"On that occasion they did not attack the Chinese engineers because the target was the project on which they were working."Now, future attacks of this kind are likely to target security forces and Chinese engineers alike," the report said.The most likely scenario would be that Al-Qaeda's central leadership would encourage their affiliates in North Africa and the Arabian peninsula to attack Chinese targets near at hand, it said.Al-Qaeda centrally does "not want to open a new front with China," the analysis said."But equally their sense of Muslim solidarity compels them to help and/or to be seen to be helping. This is also a factor in helping the organisation regain support and funding from their global constituency."

Chinese authorities have said that riots in the Xinjiang city of Urumqi by Muslim Uighurs on July 5 left 184 people dead -- most of whom were Han, China's dominant ethnic group -- and more than 1,600 injured.Uighur leaders accuse Chinese forces of opening fire on peaceful protests, in the latest unrest to rock the Muslim-majority region of Xinjiang.Chinese authorities have previously blamed low-level attacks on Xinjiang's East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which Beijing, the United States and the United Nations list as a terrorist organisation.

China has also said that ETIM militants have received some training and funding from Al-Qaeda.However, many experts have told AFP that they doubt the ETIM is a major threat in Xinjiang, and some lawmakers in the United States are pushing for the terrorist label to be lifted.The US government meanwhile last month released four Uighurs from the Guantanamo Bay detention site, years after clearing them of any wrongdoing. Beijing's bid to have them extradited was denied and they are now in Bermuda.

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Developing states seek 'new world order' at NAM

By: AFP
Published: 15/07/2009 at 11:59 AM

Leaders of the developing world were in Egypt for the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to discuss the effect of the global financial crisis on their countries.But the organisation's 15th summit, attended by 55 heads of state, is likely to be overshadowed by talks on the sidelines between nuclear rivals India and Pakistan, both NAM members.Cuban President Raul Castro will address the opening session of the two-day gathering at the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh where Egypt will take over the chairmanship of the 118-member movement from Cuba.

The summit will "provide for a chance for discussions over the international economic crisis, which first started in the industrialised countries, and greatly impacted the developing countries, especially Africa," Zimbabwe Foreign Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi was quoted by the official MENA news agency as saying.He said industrialised states "should not be given free rein to manage such a crisis."

On Monday, during preparatory talks, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit said the summit aimed for "a new international order... in which nations (are not judged) by their size or military and economic capabilities."Delegates at Monday and Tuesday's preparatory ministerial meetings indicated to AFP that the new US administration's departure from a policy of unilateral diplomacy could help to achieve that goal.Prime Ministers Yousuf Raza Gilani of Pakistan and Manmohan Singh of India are to meet on the sidelines amid hopes of a resumption of peace talks between the arch-foes, who have fought three wars.

Their meeting would be the second high-level talks since relations soured after last year's attacks in the Indian commercial capital Mumbai which killed 166 people and were blamed on the banned Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).India wants Pakistan to take action against those behind the attacks before resuming a fragile peace process launched in 2004 that was frozen after the deadly assaults.India, along with host Egypt, is a founding member of the NAM. The largest grouping of countries outside the United Nations, it is aimed at giving a voice to the developing world.

Founded in 1955, NAM's 118 member states represent around 56 percent of the global population. NAM states consider themselves not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc.Set up during the Cold War, the movement sought to distance itself from both the Western and Soviet blocs, but today its raison d'etre is questioned after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing shift in power politics.

NAM heads of state and government meet every three years. The next meeting will be held in Iran.The movement groups 53 states from Africa, 38 from Asia, 26 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and just one from Europe -- the former Soviet republic of Belarus.It has 16 observer countries and nine observer organisations.

Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

China alerts citizens in Algeria to Al-Qaeda threat

By: AFP
Published: 15/07/2009 at 11:59 AM

China issued a heightened security alert to its citizens in Algeria after Al-Qaeda reportedly vowed to avenge the deaths of Muslims killed in ethnic unrest in northwestern Xinjiang region."The Chinese Embassy in Algeria is specially calling on Chinese-funded organisations and personnel to raise their security awareness and strengthen security measures," the embassy said in a statement on its website Tuesday.Such measures should be taken "in view of the situation following the violent criminal incident in Urumqi on July 5," the statement said, without elaborating.

Chinese citizens should immediately report to embassy personnel any "emergency matter" that may arise in Algeria, it said.According to a report by the London-based risk analysis firm Stirling Assynt, an Algerian Al-Qaeda affiliate has vowed to avenge the deaths of Muslims killed in Xinjiang by targeting Chinese workers in northwest Africa.Hundreds of thousands of Chinese work in the Middle East and North Africa, including 50,000 in Algeria, the report said.

Chinese authorities have said unrest and riots in Xinjiang's capital Urumqi on July 5 left 184 people dead -- most of whom were Han, China's dominant ethnic group -- and more than 1,600 injured.Ethnic Muslim Uighurs, many of whom have chafed under China's 60-year rule in Xinjiang, have accused Chinese forces of opening fire on peaceful protests, and say the number of people killed is far higher than the official tally.On Tuesday, the foreign ministry said it would take all necessary measures to protect its overseas interests following the report."We will keep a close eye on developments and make joint efforts with relevant countries to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of overseas Chinese institutions and people," foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters.

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UN discuss sanctions to target NKorean individuals

By: AFP
Published: 15/07/2009 at 03:59 PM

The UN Security Council is discussing sanctions which for the first time will target individuals involved in North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes, a South Korean official has said.The 15-member council on June 12 imposed sanctions on the North following its May 25 nuclear test, banning all weapons shipments except small arms and authorising cargo inspections.The council has since been discussing a list of entities, goods and individuals to be subject to the sanctions.

"Unlike before, the list they are working on will include North Korean individuals this time," a Seoul government official told AFP on condition of anonymity."You may say sanctions are toughening."Previous sanctions targeted companies whose overseas assets were frozen, but not individuals.The official did not say how many people would be on the list or who they were, adding that the Security Council was still in talks.

Local media has said they would likely include Ju Kyu-Chang, a National Defence Commission member supervising nuclear and missile development, and two nuclear scientists -- So Sang-Kuk of Kim Il Sung University and Li Yong-Ha of Yongbyon Physics University."Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed," the official said, in response to media reports that 15 people would face travel bans and a freeze on any overseas assets.

However he said there was a "strong sentiment" that the list should be finalised no later than Wednesday New York time, to meet an extended deadline of July 19.The United States has been pushing for tough enforcement of the sanctions. China, a long-time ally of North Korea, has traditionally been more cautious.Since a long-range rocket launch in early April, the North has staged its second nuclear test, fired a variety of shorter-range missiles, renounced the truce in force on the Korean peninsula and quit nuclear disarmament talks.

US and South Korean officials believe ailing leader Kim Jong-Il, 67, is staging a show of strength to bolster his authority as he tries to put in place a succession plan involving his youngest son Jong-Un.

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Partnership: An option and necessity

Sh. Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa , Manana , Bahrain | Wed, 07/01/2009 12:14 PM | Opinion

The world has changed. Old certainties are giving way to new realities and partnerships between regional blocs to play more active roles in tackling the challenges before us are today of the essence.

The global financial crisis underlines the need to review our priorities and our policies to take account of the shifting economic structures in light of this crisis, such as the emergence of the G20, for example, as a global player of real weight.

For the 10 members of ASEAN a political, trade investment, and cultural partnership with the GCC - the six nations of the Arabian Gulf - offers strong opportunities. This is the thinking behind the history-making Ministerial meeting in Manama between our two regional blocs.

GCC-ASEAN cooperation needs to be focused and nuanced, prioritizing the promotion of international peace and security, poverty alleviation, human resource development, enhancement of trade and investment, environment protection and sustainable development, fighting terrorism and extremism, and the encouragement of cultural and media exchange and cooperation.

We have a packed agenda to explore. But important issues include energy and food security and sustainable development, not to mention coordinating positions in international forums. In a world that too often succumbs to short term fads and fancies, we are determined to build solidly for the long term.

Furthermore, our two economic blocs are growth centers for the new global economy. Together we have the potential to be among the leaders of renewed international economic growth, for the benefit of all countries, in our regions and beyond. Already we in the GCC add up collectively to a single market worth around US$1 trillion. And that is just a beginning.

By 2020, according to the calculations of the Economist Intelligence Unit, our common Gulf market will have doubled again in size to $2 trillion. That is two trillion reasons for ASEAN to form a future partnership with us.

We are committed to open markets, and trading and investing across frontiers. We are not protectionist by temperament. We are careful not to over borrow, and to treat complex financial instruments with the caution that they have been shown to deserve.

We are just as committed as ASEAN to make sure that the GCC succeeds. Our aims are ambitious but they are attainable, in a very short space of time.

This is the encouraging background to our joint Ministerial Retreat - this informal yet, I am sure, effective dialogue of ASEAN and the GCC to draw up a realistic roadmap towards a practical working relationship between our countries and peoples. A partnership between the GCC and ASEAN will be no surprise to anyone who knows our mutual history. We in the GCC are Asian and proud of it.

For thousands of years our two regions have traded with each other and embraced our respective cultures. Then, as now, our relations were not just between Governments. Enterprising entrepreneurs developed profitable ties with each other and long-lasting personal friendships between our two peoples were forged.

As we move towards stronger political, cultural and economic cooperation, we will be encouraging our peoples to find new ways to work together for the benefit of both regions. At both public and private level, we hope to see joint ventures spring up in banking and finance, trade and technology, and education and culture.

Each GCC country already has its own links with ASEAN. Speaking for Bahrain, I pay tribute from direct experience to the drive and enterprise of our ASEAN trade partners.

As the main banking center in the MENA region much of our co-operation has focused on banking and financial services. For example, we in Bahrain have exchanged ideas very profitably with ASEAN financial institutions on Islamic finance.This is a classic illustration of how working together enables both sides to obtain greater benefits than if we acted alone.

That is why I feel privileged to have initiated the Ministerial Meeting so that we can tap into the political, economic and cultural potential before us.

A partnership between ASEAN and the GCC is an idea whose time has come.

The writer is Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

RI, Malaysia strive to defuse possible clash

Dicky Christanto , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Wed, 07/01/2009 9:48 AM | National

We're friends, Sir: Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono (right) walks with his Malaysian counterpart Dato' Seri Ahmad Zaid bin Hamidi, to a meeting at the Defense Ministry where they held a joint press conference Tuesday. Ahmad Zaid was here to discuss the border dispute between the two countries. JP/Nurhayati

Indonesian and Malaysian defense ministers Tuesday highlighted the importance of organizing more informal meetings to help settle future problems.

"From now on, we need to organize more informal meetings as an alternative to settling things in the future," Indonesian Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono told journalists.

Sudarsono said he encouraged military communities from both Indonesia and Malaysia to visit each other more frequently so they could strengthen ties, which would be useful when both countries faced future conflict regarding national defense.

"I even strongly suggest that retired generals contact each other and see if they can contribute to settling problems in the future," he added.

Sudarsono made the remarks following an hour-long meeting in Jakarta with his Malaysian

counterpart Malaysia, Dato Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Tuesday's meeting was aimed at discussing a heated dispute over Ambalat waters and the need to conduct cooperation between the two countries' defense and weaponry industries.

Sharing Sudarsono's remarks, Hamidi said more informal meetings were expected to help abate future conflicts.

"Perhaps we focus too much on organizing formal meetings to deal with problems, and forget that these informal meetings are actually just as good as those formal ones for finding resolutions," he added.

"Besides, this is what our founding fathers used to do in the past," Hamidi said.

Commenting on the dispute in Ambalat waters, Sudarsono said the navies of the two countries were in great need of field commanders who were capable of cooling the tempers of their subordinates.

"These field commanders should be able to manage the tempers of their subordinates so that we can avoid any possible clashes on the field," he said.

Hamidi further said the field commanders should also be able to recognize the countries' borders.

"Country borders on the waters are the hardest ones to locate. Thus we need navy commanders who have mastered the locations in order to always have them in mind," he said.

The dispute over the Ambalat block on the northernmost area of East Kalimantan has been a concern for the past two years.

The focus of the area is its reserves of natural oil and gas amounting to 670 million cubic feet and 40 TCF (Trillion Cubic Feet) respectively.

According to the Indonesian navy patrol, the Malaysian navy has been provocative by crossing borders and preventing Indonesian fishermen from throwing nets in disputed locations they claim to be Malaysian territory.

Hamidi said he had ordered the Malaysian navy not to be so easily provoked by any situation while guarding the disputed area.

In fact, he added, the ministers had agreed to organize joint patrols in the area in an attempt to abate tension.

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Diplomatic community lauds RI's peaceful democracy

, The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Thu, 07/02/2009 1:37 PM | World

The diplomatic community commended Indonesia for its mature democracy, with no major cases of violence reported during elections so far, the dean of the diplomatic corps said Tuesday.

Indonesia held a peaceful legislative election in April in which about 171 million people were listed to go to the poll booths. On July 8, the world's third-largest democracy will hold its second direct presidential election.

"There is no fear *about the election here*," United Arab Emirates' Ambassador to Indonesia Yousif R. Alsharhan, who is also the dean of diplomatic corps in Indonesia, said after holding a meeting of regional deans at the Borobudur Hotel in Jakarta.

The meeting was attended by Algerian Ambassador and Dean of African Diplomats, Hamza Yahia-Cherif, Panamanian Ambassador and Dean of Hispano-Latin America and Caribbean Diplomats, Raul Antonio Eskildsen Arias, Serbian Ambassador and Dean of European Diplomats, Zoran Kazazovic, and the Czech Ambassador Pavel Rezac, whose country held the EU presidency until Tuesday.

"Democracy is not interrupting anything. The election here is peaceful," Alsharhan said, adding it was a great achievement as elections in other countries often lead to violence.

He said there were no complaints from more than 80 diplomatic missions in Jakarta regarding their activities during elections.

He also praised the presidential debate among the three candidates, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Megawati Soekarnoputri and Jusuf Kalla, saying he was impressed by the bluntness of each candidate in expressing their opinions.

"Compared to other countries, Indonesia is more advanced in practicing democracy," Alsharhan, who had been ambassador in five different countries before coming to Jakarta, said.

"Indonesia is the best (*in terms of democracy*." The regional groups also include ASEAN, East Asia, and European Union, he said.

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Peace, harmony and Islamic mysticism

Hilaly M Basya , Leiden | Fri, 07/03/2009 9:58 AM | Opinion

Historians believe that Islamic mysticism (tasawuf or sufism) has existed as a religious practice and discipline since the beginning of Islamic history (around the 8th century). But it was in the 12th century, during the era of Imam Ghazali, that it began to have a greater influence.

Ghazali gave contextual character to the development of Islamic mysticism. His magnum opus Ihya 'Ulum ad-Din (Reviving Religious Sciences) has become an important reference for many Indonesian Muslim scholars.

The book appeals to them because it provides answers to existential problems human being's face. It is not surprising then, that the book is admired by many Muslims to this day.

According to Martin Van Bruinessen, a Dutch expert on Islam in Indonesia, the development of Islam in Indonesia cannot be separated from the influence of Islamic mysticism. It can be traced back to the role of tarekat (the strict community of Islamic mystics) in spreading Islam in Indonesia in the 14th century through to their role in educating Muslims up until Indonesian independence. In this period, similar tarekat movements grew in other Islamic regions, including Mecca and Madina.

Beside Ghazali's works, other Tasawuf texts have served as important references for Indonesian Ulemas.

This is evidenced by the number of pesantren's (traditional Islamic schools) that make sufi works such as Bidayat al-Hidayah (The Beginning of Divine Guidance) and Minhaj al-'Abidin (The Method for the Worship of God) required texts.

In addition, Bruinessen found that Abdul Karim al-Jilli's al-Insan al-Kamil and Ibn al-'Arabi's Futuhat al-Makkiyah were still taught in some Indonesian pesantrens until the turn of the 20th century. According to Bruinessen, these two books are rather difficult to understand as they discuss philosophical mysticism.

This all indicates that development of Islam in Indonesia has been strongly influenced by Islamic mysticism. Moreover, it is believed that Islamic mysticism strengthens the peaceful values of Indonesian Islam. Unlike Islamic theology (Ilm al-Kalam) which talks more about the rationality of faith and fiqh, which treats religious teachings as regulations, Islamic mysticism seeks to evaluate, contemplate and purify the human soul.

Sufis believe that the more people reflect and think deeply about life and themselves, the wiser they will be. Experts assume that Islamic mysticism arose as an attempt to explain and deal with

people's anxiety and fear about their own existence. Imam Ghazali, for instance, began his life's work as a theologian and a philosopher.

Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah is another interesting example. She is a female sufi, who was born into slavery. Her life struggle led her to become a lover of God. She promoted a concept of love that does not try to dominate and control the loved object; it is kind of love that does not need compensation and possession. Based on her conception of love, Adawiyah advises people to conquer their bad desires.

Moreover, she states that love should liberate people from oppression and domination.

In general, Islamic mysticism calls on people to conquer themselves and create a harmonious life. Peace with is believed to be the key to happiness. For Sufis, human desire to dominate is the cause of suffering. Desire is defined as will that is not related to primary need.

Creating peace within means conquering inner conflict. According to Islamic mysticism, human happiness is found in the love of and obedience to God.

Such teachings were a large part of the spread and color of early Indonesian Islam and they remain important.

Therefore, the moderate character of Islam in Indonesia is attributable to Islamic mysticism, which is focused on the contemplation of human existence, including how people see their life and their relation with nature. We hope that the development of Islam in Indonesia will bring peace and harmony.

The writer is a student of Islamic Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands and a Muhammadiyah activist.

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Letters: Will RI-US ties improve?

Sat, 07/04/2009 1:05 PM | Reader's Forum

This is a comment on an article titled "Washington takes new look at Jakarta under Obama: Envoy," (the Post, June 2).

My comment is not directed to Ambassador Cameron Hume, but at the wider media community.

I don't understand why the reporting of improved or worsened relations between the US and Indonesia takes the perspective of what the US does or doesn't do.

When is Indonesia going to take responsibility for their part in the relationship? What is Indonesia doing to improve the relationship with the US?

Or is it the US that has to do everything?

Previously people wanted (actually, enjoyed) blaming Bush for supposed poor relations between the US and Indonesia. But what did Bush ever do to Indonesia?

Thankfully Cameron Hume (and the Post for reporting it) said that the relationship actually improved under the Bush administration. Firstly, before (or if) people reply to my comment, I will announce that I am not a Bush supporter and I am not even a US citizen.

But I am continually annoyed at the common assumption that Indonesian-US relationship will be better under Obama, ignoring efforts made by the previous administration, like dropping trade sanctions on non-combative military hardware.

Are people forgetting the Democrat Party's position on Papua? Those that voted against the lifting of the sanctions were Democrats.

Iain Robert Shearer
Jakarta

Source URL: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/07/04/letters-will-rius-ties-improve.html-0

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Where is our democracy heading to? India or Iran?

Mario Masaya , Bandung , | Sat, 07/04/2009 1:05 PM | Opinion

The recent elections in Iran have led to chaos not only in the streets, but chaos in its democracy. We surely don't want Indonesia in the same situation as Iran. Some may ask whether Iran is really ready for democracy.

Iran is perhaps not a fully democratic country. The Islamic Republic was born not through a democratic movement, but rather through a revolution. Iran's system of governance is complicated and is still not fully compatible with a "checks and balances" system, since there is a supreme leader, who also controls The Revolutionary Guard, the most powerful military force in the country.

The picture in India is very different. After the election last May, the two biggest parties, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the Congress party, formed a coalition to produce an effective government. The Indian people made the election go smoothly and the results were accepted by all Indian people. The Indian elections were harmonious.

Let us turn back to Indonesia. Indonesian people believe that Indonesia is moving towards becoming a fully democratic state. Yes it is, but only institutionally. In fact, Indonesian people are unprepared for democracy in several ways.

Josef Brodsky, the Nobel Prize winning Russian poet, once wrote that, "Free men, if failed, will not blame anyone". This is not the case in Indonesia. In many past regional elections the people have not accepted the results when their opponent won.

This was the case, for example, in the North Maluku region elections. The supporters of the two candidate governors, Thaib Armaiyn and Abdul Gafur, fought each other because they both claimed to have won. Similarly in South Sumatra, the supporters of Syahrial Oesman-Helmy Yahya, unsatisfied with the outcome of the elections, demonstrated, leading to clashes with police.

A far more obvious case is the behavior of our three presidential candidates. Megawati Soekarnoputri still cannot forgive incumbent President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono for leaving her cabinet to go on and defeat her in the 2004 presidential election.

In the April 9 legislative elections, many Indonesian political parties refused to accept their defeat and have taken legal action against their political opponents.

It is an urgent necessity to educate the people, as well as politicians, if Indonesia wishes to become

a "mature democracy". The obligation to educate the people politically is not only the responsibility of the government and the mass media but is the duty of political parties and all people who aware of the problems.

It is however important to note that the media is one of the most important pillars of democracy. The people's opinions and mindset are shaped by the mass media. Therefore, in order to achieve a "mature democracy", what we need is for the media to recognize its moral obligation to emphasize important issues, like the programs of the candidates.

It is not an easy job, but it is the right thing to do. The future of Indonesian democracy is in our hands. We can learn from the experiences of both Iran and India.

The writer is a student of International Relations at Prahyangan Catholic University

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Bomb blast in south Philippines kills at least 2

The Jakarta Post , Manila | Tue, 07/07/2009 9:21 AM | World

A crude bomb hidden on a motorcycle on Tuesday exploded in a port city on a southern Philippine island where al-Qaida-linked militants are active, killing at least two people and wounding 24, officials said.

The motorcycle was parked across from a store that was wrecked in the early-morning blat in downtown Jolo, killing the store owner instantly, police and the military said.

Another homemade bomb found nearby was detonated by authorities, said Jolo Mayor Hussin Amin.

At least two were confirmed dead, but the number of fatalities was expected to rise because many of the wounded – including wo policemen - were in critical condition, said regional military commander Maj. Gen. Juancho Sabban.

Most of the wounded were passers-by, and authorities suspended school classes in Jolo for fear of more attacks.

A radio report said police initially suspected the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf group in he explosion.

The explosion follows a bomb blast Sunday outside a Roman Catholic cathedral in Cotabato city on the main southern island of Mindanao, which killed six people and wounded scores others in an attack the military blamed on the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

The rebels denied it.They have waged a decades-long battle for self-rule in the southern Mindanao region, homeland of Muslims in this predominantly Roman Catholic nation.

Malaysian-brokered peace talks between the government and the rebels collapsed last year when a preliminary deal on an expanded Muslim autonomous region fell apart, sparking deadly clashes that have displaced large numbers of villagers.

Unlike the Moro rebels, who are pursuing on-and-off talks with the government, the Abu Sayyaf is considered a terrorist organization because of its al-Qaida links and many terrorist attacks, including ones on Americans.

The group and its allies, numbering about 400, have turned to kidnappings to make money in recent years, raising concerns among Philippine and U.S. security officials that ransom payments could revive the group, which has been weakened by years of U.S.-backed offensives.

Source URL: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/07/07/bomb-blast-south-philippines-kills-least-2.html

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Special Report: SE Asian countries share water worries

, , | Sat, 07/11/2009 12:51 PM | City

Singapore hosted the Singapore International Water Week (SIWW) for the second time, June 28 to July 2. With the theme "Sustainable Cities -Infrastructure and Technologies for Water", the event invited various groups interested in achieving water sustainability, including municipal leaders and businesspeople. The event comprised of an expo, leaders' summit, conventions and business forums. To promote the event in Indonesia, the event committee invited The Jakarta Post's **Triwik Kurniasari**. *This is what she learned.*

Many problems persist in providing potable water in most country's in the Asia-Pacific region, as the development of water sources is not keeping pace with population growth and projected demand.

Strong economic growth in the region and population pressures, compounded by increased urbanization, have led to a sharp rise in the use of treated water. Pollution and climate change meanwhile pose ever present threats to the precious resource.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reported that in 2004, 635 million people in the Asia-Pacific region did not have access to safe drinking water. These are some of the 1.86 billion people that currently do not have access to adequate sanitation.

The huge number of slum areas in the region complicates the problem.

According to the ADB's latest data, the Asia-Pacific region has 554 million slum dwellers: 64 percent of the global total. At least 40 percent of these people also lack access to piped water or sanitation services.

"This demographic requires investment and infrastructure and service deliverance in resource management," said Anthony Jude, director of energy and water division of ADB's Southeast Asia Department.

"From a regional perspective, I can tell you that urban and rural water supply and sanitation are priority areas for the ADB in Southeast Asia."

The forum was attended by delegations from a number of Southeast Asian nations including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR).

In Indonesia, the ADB works hand-in-hand with the government to develop metropolitan sanitation

infrastructure and projects that will improve public health, reduce pollution and better the lives of the people. They also work to improve wastewater collection, sanitation services and treatment and solid waste management.

Mayor of Palembang Eddy Santana Putra, who represented Indonesia at the forum, said the capital of South Sumatra lacks the technical assistance and technology needed to improve water services.

"We currently provide 85 percent of our residents with clean water, but we need more trained experts to improve our water management," he said, adding that the administration hopes to increase supply to 95 percent of residents by 2012.

He said that during the SIWW, members of the Palembang administration received training from Singapore's Public Utilities Board on how to control water revenue and detect leaks.

The administration, Eddy said, is in the process of installing new water pipes to expand capacity and reach new areas.

"Although we have plenty of water, we are encouraging people to save more water, consume it wisely and efficiently, and keep water resources *rivers* clean, because we might face water scarcity in the next five or 10 years. We will never know," he said.

He said that he aimed to lessen the rate of water consumption, which stands at 200 liters per person, per day.

Meanwhile, sewage and sanitation systems remain a major problem, with septic tanks being the predominant method of waste management in Palembang.

"Palembang and other big cities in Indonesia, including Jakarta, are behind in sewage systems," said Eddy. "We should learn from other countries about how to manage the wastewater and treat it properly."

Cambodia, which has an area of more than 181,000 square kilometers, also struggles to supply water to its 13 million citizens.

Ek Son Chan, general director of the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority, said that as of 2005, 68 percent of Cambodia's urban population and 30 percent of its rural population had access to clean water.

"We have set a target of increasing the number to 74 percent in urban areas and 40 percent in rural areas by 2010," he said.

In a bid to achieve this goal, the Cambodian government has set aside US$70.4 million to achieve a production capacity of 10,000 cubic meters per day and lay 195 kilometers of pipes by the end of this year.

"In 2015, we will undergo the second project with a production capacity of 130,000 cubic meter per day and 195 kilometers of distribution networks," Ek said.

The Lao PDR is meanwhile aiming to provide clean water to its 5.8 million people.

As of 2008, Sommad Pholsena, the Minister of Communications, Transportation, Post and Construction, said the country supplied more than 83 million cubic meters of clean water to serve 825,500 citizens, or nearly 140,000 households in 54 towns and villages.

The country, he said, has 61 water treatment plants. In urban areas, 51 percent of the population is served.

"We target to increase the availability of safe and piped water to 80 percent of the urban population by 2020," Sommad said.

He said that the Lao government had plans to expand services, with a focus on poor areas, in cities across the country, including the capital of Vientiane, secondary towns like Pakse, Kaysone, Thakhek and Luangprabang, as well as small towns that do not have piped water.

Brunei Darussalam, which supplies safe, potable water to 100 percent of its 385,000 citizens, is nonetheless also building infrastructure including dams, treatment plants, reservoirs, pipe mains and storm drains and improving technology to cater for growing demand.

The ADB is working to assist governments in the Asia-Pacific region to provide clean water through the Water Financing Program 2006-2010, which is expected to provide more than 95.5 million people access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation.

ADB President Haruhiko Kuroda encouraged governments in Asia and the Pacific to continue to invest in water infrastructure in spite of the economic crisis lest they face fundamental threats to economic growth and social development.

Kuroda said economic recessions could present opportunities, noting that a shortage of public funding for water sector infrastructure could be filled by the private sector.

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Reforms expected at UN Security Council

Anak Agung Banyu Perwita , Bandung | Mon, 07/13/2009 11:26 AM | Opinion

Debate on the need to reform the UN Security Council (UNSC) is not a new issue in today's global politics. This question has been a crucial international issue since the 1990s. Prof. Francis Fukuyama even argued that "the world is far too diverse and complex to be overseen properly by a single global body".

The call to reform the UNSC, aims not only at increasing the number of the members (permanent and non permanent members), but also enabling the UNSC to play a more significant role in making a more sustainable global peace. Many believe that international order is in urgent need of reform.

In the context of current global politics, there are at least two different perspectives on the need to reform the UNSC.

The first perspective, which has been proposed by most developing countries and some developed countries such as Germany and Japan, argues that the existence of membership change and the lift of the veto right will provide more legitimacy to any decisions taken by the UNSC. This perspective hardly highlights the need to increase the capacity of the UNSC to overcome global problems.

More specifically, the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) countries proposed an addition of five permanent member states consisting of two African states, one member from Asia, one member from Latin America and one member from a developed country.

For the additional membership of non permanent seats, the NAM proposes that members should come from three African states, two Asian states, one member from Latin America, one from an Arabian state and one from an industrial state that is likely to be fought over between Germany, Japan, Canada, Italian and Sweden. Thereby the full membership number of the UNSC would include 28 members (10 permanent members and 18 nonpermanent members).

This proposal, of course, also invites warm debate between the developing countries, especially about the non permanent membership. Major power countries such as Brazil and India have refused this proposal. Whereas countries like Argentina, Mexico, Pakistan and Indonesia support this proposal.

At the same time, the latter proposal would prop up the effectiveness of the UNSC in the decision making process. However, many people have expressed that "the group would be too large to conduct serious negotiations and still too small to represent the UN membership as a whole".

Therefore, the problem of decision making effectiveness will become increasingly important. This problem becomes more complicated when there is still no consensus and equality of positions among the proponent states on how many states should be included in the UNSC and what particular states should become members of the UNSC.

Various UNSC reform proposals, especially those submitted by the NAM, seem to depend on the political willingness of them to reach consensus and agreement to create a common position.

In most cases, the NAM is still "a house divided" in facing common issues in the multilateral arena, including the UN. This is especially indicated by two different phenomenon.

On one side, there are efforts to make a change by one state or group of states, but on the other side, there are also actions to disrupt changes by other nations with various arguments in the form of different national perceptions and purposes of specific reform of the UNSC that is relatively still turning tail.

The second perspective, which has been endorsed by developed nations, especially the US, argues that the UNSC was never designed to geographically represent the membership of the UN, but refers more to great powers having the right to make decisions based on their economic power and military capability.

Nation-states like the US and the UK continue to espouse a strong cold war mentality by rejecting the possibility of increasing the membership of the UNSC.

This mentality also highlights how major powers always try to maintain the status-quo. The logic of the axiom "if it ain't broken, doesn't fix it" is still strong, as shown by states refusing to extend the membership of the UNSC.

They also maintain the argument - that placing priority on broader participation and inclusion - is likely to weaken cooperation.

Even now the US tends to stand as the hyper-puissance (hyper-power). The US will never permit any international institution that can limit its national actions and interests. In reality, there are two international "organizations" in current global politics: The UN with its global membership and the US with its global power.

According to the US, any changes of the veto rights and membership should be based on the amendment of the UN Charter. Meanwhile, the amendment of the charter will significantly affect international law and global politics.

However, the US will push the UNSC to work more effectively, but the US will not participate in any international institutions that aim to limit its power. Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the US Senate, has also stressed that "Without very substantial reform, there is little reason to believe the UN will be able to realize the goals of its charter in the future".

Therefore, the initiative to reform the UNSC depends on the US. At this level, any answer to the question of " who will determine *decide* change and reform of the UNSC" will hardly having an effect on the type and the degree of reform in UNSC.

The writer is professor of International Relations, Parahyangan Catholic University, Bandung and Director, Division of Global Affairs, Indonesia Institute for Strategic Studies, Jakarta.

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

Indonesia in the L'Aquila G8 Summit: A food security perspective

Danny Rahdiansyah , Roma , | Wed, 07/15/2009 11:54 AM | Opinion

After its historic participation in the 2008 Toyako-Hokkaido Summit, this year Indonesia again takes part in the G8 Summit meeting in L'Aquila, Italy, under the framework of the Major Economies Forum (MEF).

In this summit, Indonesia is involved in discussions on strategic issues that have national and global implications, namely energy and climate change, trade and food security.

The convening of this year's G8 Summit coincides with the presidential election in Indonesia. This situation means President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is unable to attend the summit.

In this regard, he appointed the Trade Minister Mari Elka Pangestu and the State Minister for the Environment Minister Rachmat Witoelar as his special envoy to L'Aquila.

Food security is indeed an issue of global concern. Last year the world experienced the devastating impact of a food crisis when the price of food commodities skyrocketed.

According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), from 2007 to 2008, the number of undernourished people in the world rose by 40 million to a total of 963 million. Kanayo F. Nwanze, IFAD's president said just recently that the number of hungry people in the world had reached 1.02 billion - the highest ever.

Nowadays even though the price of food commodities has decreased from a peak in mid-2008, if we look back over the last few years, they remain high (around 17 percent higher than the 2006 prices and 24 percent higher than they were in 2005). In addition to this, the volatility level is also high.

Indonesia performed very well in coping with the 2008 food crisis by showing strong resilience to the impact of the high food prices. As a result of this success, Indonesia's voice is better-heard in the international area.

The world wants us to share our experience in facing the threat of the food crisis and wants to know our national strategy on food security. This is a precious diplomatic chip to pursue our agenda and to push the international community to handle the issue of food security in a better way.

Prior to the summit meeting, some international media indicated the L'Aquila Summit would commit more than US$12 billion to agricultural development over the next three years. What does

this signify? It is clearly a signal of a shift from food aid to more long-term investment in farming, especially in the developing world. Food aid is no longer enough. As the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated last month, "It is, at best, a short-term fix".

What is more important, is to increase funding and long term investment in the agriculture sector, especially to help small-holder farmers alleviate poverty. On this note, the Prime Minister of Japan Taro Aso also wrote in the Financial Times, "Lasting investment is the only viable solution for a sustainable future, and we must work to restore confidence in the market, particularly among food-importing countries concerned by the proliferation of export restrictions. Charity alone cannot be a lasting solution".

What does the above indicate Indonesia? Currently we have around 43 million people working in agriculture sector. This is roughly 18 percent of total population.

That is a lot of people depending on agriculture for their livelihood. The agriculture sector itself contributed around 14 percent of the total share of Indonesia's GDP in 2007.

Thus an increased amount of investment in the agricultural sector means that more Indonesian people will have a better chance to alleviate themselves from poverty, strengthen the agriculture sector in the Indonesian economic system, and also contribute to stronger world food security.

The writer is Indonesian diplomat based in Rome. This is a personal opinion.

The Jakarta Post
Published on The Jakarta Post (http://www.thejakartapost.com)

In Egypt, Non-Aligned nations focus on meltdown

Associated Press , Sharm El-Sheik, Egypt | Wed, 07/15/2009 8:15 PM | World

Cuba's president on Wednesday called for an international financial system that better takes into account developing countries interests, as the global recession captured the spotlight at a summit of non-aligned nations.

Raul Castro's remarks at the opening session of the two-day Non-Aligned Movement's meeting in this Red Sea resort were echoed by other leaders and build on earlier discussions among officials from the 118-nation grouping of mostly of African, Asian and Latin American nations.

"We demand the establishment of a new international financial and economic structure that relies on the participation of all countries," Castro said, ahead of handing over the movement's presidency to Egypt.

"There must be a new framework that doesn't depend solely on the economic stability and the political decision of only one country," the Cuban leader said, apparently referring to the United States.

The new system must give developing countries "preferential treatment," he said without elaborating.

As the global meltdown roiled world markets, erasing trillions in dollars in individual, corporate and government wealth, calls have mounted for greater market regulation and a shift from the use of the dollar as the main foreign reserve currency. Developing nations have argued that their growth and stability is being undercut by a crisis in which they had no part in creating.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon touched on the issue, saying that "the economic crisis has revealed the need to improve the international financial architecture, so we may see the developing world and emerging powers gain more of a say in that realm."

Source URL: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/07/15/in-egypt-nonaligned-nations-focus-meltdown.html

The Nation

Print Cancel

Opinion

Patani Malay separatists at a crossroads

Published on July 14, 2009

FIVE YEARS ago, the Patani United Liberation Organisation (Pulo) was at a crossroads. The long-standing Malay Muslim separatist group that emerged in the late 1960s was in disarray. Its splinter groups had splinter groups. If anything, it was the worst time to be in disarray. A new generation of militants had just emerged on the ground, operating in full force. Some of the old guard, including the Pulo rank-and-file, thought it was an opportunity to get back into the scheme of things.

Like other long-standing groups whose members have been living in exile since their generation of fighters went down in the early 1990s, Pulo was willing to talk to the Thai authorities. The movement was willing to settle for something less than full independence.

And so for the past five years, group members have been shuttling back and forth to various pockets of Patani Malay exiles in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Europe to get everybody on board.

It was hoped that some sort of peace process could be jumpstarted with the Thais. The hard part was getting the new generation of militants to agree. In order to do that, the new generation of militants, as well as the old guard from the previous generation, has to be convinced that there is an endgame to the violence.

This means dropping the word "independent" in exchange for something along the lines of "self determination", but under the context of the Thai state.

Exiled leaders told The Nation that it was hard for some to swallow this transition at first, but more and more are progressing toward the idea of talking to the enemy.

A slight hiccup came just one year ago when Pulo's founder, Tengku Bira Kotonila passed away in Damascus, Syria. "Tengku Bira will be missed. He has been ill for some time. Our struggle will go on," The Nation quoted Pulo foreign affairs chief, Kasturi Makota, as saying at the time.

The struggle goes on. Just this past week, after several rounds of meetings and sounding out more than 130 of the group's senior figures, a new line up has been chosen to take the

struggle to the next level.

Nur Abdul Rahman was elected as the new president, while Kasturi, who continues to hold the foreign affairs portfolio, became his deputy.

The group is also fine-tuning its position, which includes endorsement for a peace process, support for the use of military means for political settlement, and upholding the principle of self-determination.

But becoming a mainstream political force is easier said than done. The group made some headway during the Surayud Chulanont administration, but the short-lived interim government was not able to institutionalise their relationship.

The successive governments of Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat were too bogged down with street protests and had no time for any long-term initiative, much less a dialogue process with the separatists.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva is trying to pick up where Surayud left off, but has been finding it difficult to convince the conservative quarters in the government, namely the Internal Security Operation Command (Isoc) and the military, that talking to the enemy is the best way to go.

While the Abhisit government explores the idea of talking to the separatists, Pulo is working hard to convince other groups of the merit of talking to the Thai authorities. A Pulo insider said the Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Co-ordinate (BRN-C) is the toughest group of all to convince.

Other groups claim to have some sort of network on the ground, but it is generally agreed the BRN-C is the most important group of all, as its members are said to have direct contact with the militants.

Members of the communities in exile say not all of the BRN Co-ordinate members are convinced that talking to the Thais is what they want at this point in time. Some favour the idea of working with other long-standing groups, while others favour the idea of taking a wait-and-see approach.

But as they toyed with the idea of a peace process, a group of six gunmen massacred 11 Malay Muslims at the Al-Furquan mosque in Narathiwat's Joh I Rong district on June 8. The incident jolted everybody, including the militants on the ground and the exiled Patani Malay communities. None believed that it was the work of the militants, as suggested by the Thai authorities.

According to sources in the exiled community, BRN-C has threatened to stay away from whatever pre-dialogue process might be about to emerge. Co-ordinate members told their Pulo counterparts that they want to see how the Thais will respond to the massacre. An indifferent attitude from Bangkok could mean an absence of cooperation from the Co-

ordinate.

A serious investigation into the mosque killings could very well be the thing that convinces the BRN hard-liners that the government is serious about any peace process that might emerge. And of course, justice for the victims' families will also be a prerequisite.

Even if the BRN hard-liners agree to give the peace process the benefit of the doubt, there is also the big question as to how the militants on the ground - often referred to as juwae - will take up the initiative of the old guard.

Said a senior Army general overseeing security in the deep South, "The militants see themselves as winning this war against the Thai state."

Like others, the general doesn't think the BRN-Co-ordinate's link to the juwae constitutes a shared command. Indeed, talking is one thing, but can the BRN-Co-ordinate tell the juwae to put down their arms?

July 16, 2009 10:27 am (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

The Nation

Print Cancel

Opinion

EDITORIAL
Change is inevitable in Iran and must come now

Published on July 13, 2009

Brutal clampdowns by the present regime cannot silence the protesters forever

It ain't over until the fat lady sings. Well, there doesn't seem to be any fat lady on the streets of Tehran in these past few days. Instead, the world is witnessing tens of thousands of courageous Iranian men and women making their voices heard.

And instead of singing, they are shouting, chanting and telling the powers that be that they want change and they want it now.

About a month ago Iran's Guardian Council, the highest decision-making body in the country, endorsed the questionable re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The mullahs said it was a free and fair election but obviously a significant number of people in this Islamic republic don't seem to think so.

They greeted the announcement with mass protests that lasted for days until the authorities unleashed massive numbers of troops to halt their advances.

But it was obvious that, as seen this past Thursday, the tactic did not work. Iranian authorities may have temporarily halted the mass demonstrations but they could do nothing to change the people's determination to see change. Protesters, held back for a few days to regroup, unleashed an overwhelming show of force. A public holiday was announced.

In defiance of the government, they returned to the streets on Thursday in spite of threats from the government that brutal force would be use.

The problem with Ahmadinejad is that he does not think the demonstrators count. Instead, he referred to them as "trash". And yet, as video footages and media reports revealed, no amount of teargas canisters could dampen their spirit. The more the police swing their batons the stronger their spirit grows.

Some of the people were bloodied but their passion for change appeared to outweigh the fear of physical pain.

Presidential candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi openly challenged the "free and fair" verdict of

the powerful Guardian Council, while former president, Mohammad Khatami, also voiced his disapproval of the way the election was held. He is expected to pursue his complaints through the legal system.

In spite of growing restlessness among the public and certain political quarters, the establishment is not going to let up easily. "If some people make moves that are contrary to security initiatives under the influence of anti-revolutionary networks, they will be trampled under the feet of our alert people," Tehran governor Morteza Tamadon told the official IRNA news agency.

There is no doubt that democracy will come to Iran. The country today is not the Iran of 1979 when the Shah was ousted by street protests as the mullahs stepped in to fill the power vacuum.

A majority of the country's people are young and don't relate to the 1979 revolution, no matter how glorious the mullahs claimed that episode to be in the proud history of the Iranian people.

Today's Iranians are not just young but energetic and want to connect with the world.

Iran will not be able to contain the aspirations of the young people today no matter how many times they shut down the mobile-phone system or disrupt the short text messages or close universities and declare public holidays. Neither the holidays nor any excuses, including blaming the West and foreign media, will dampen the will of the Iranian people.

However, is Iran's blame-game really fair? Is it the fault of media and the West or is it Iran that has to change?

In the international arena, Iran is being clobbered left and right over its ambitions to become a nuclear power. One wonders if such an aspiration is in the interests of the Iranian people.

As US President Barack Obama hinted at the G-8 Summit in Italy, a new move against Iran could mean new UN sanctions or unilateral US penalties.

Leaders attending the G-8 have set a September time frame for Iran to respond to offers to discuss its nuclear programme. Iran owes it to its people and the world to make its intention clear.

The G-8 leaders also issued a joint statement deploring Iran's crackdown on protesters.

Clearly the world is telling Iran that it has a choice between diplomacy and isolation. By US estimates, Iran is one to three years away from the capability to make nuclear weapons.

Ahmadinejad insists the programme is intended only for peaceful nuclear purposes. But obviously, the world, including his own people, do not believe him.

The Nation

Print Cancel

Opinion

Everyone is complicit in propping up the evil Burmese regime

Published on July 8, 2009

Re: "Burmese junta does not respect anyone", Editorial, July 7.

You rightly address the visit of the secretary-general of the United Nations to Burma in your Tuesday editorial as it is of regional and international importance, and you are rightly dismissive, in general, towards the effectiveness of this visit. I share your feelings but mine are far more extreme as they are simply derision.

This man in his toadying to a regime which everyone seems to have conveniently forgotten is totally illegitimate - having acted to prevent a democratically elected government taking office and removing its leader from society and keeping her in total isolation - has yet again given it credibility and legitimacy.

He, his office and the United Nations have been comprehensively ridiculed by a murderous thug parading as the leader of Burma. This is a man who ruthlessly suppresses the people of Burma, murders monks, and while the country starves happily organises a wedding for his daughter that made the excesses of the American soap operas "Dallas" and "Dynasty" look small beer.

Yet Thai ministers merrily trot off to this vile regime, along with an endless collection of others, to, in their words, "engage" with the generals in the hope of encouraging them to have a Pauline conversion and happily move the country to a democracy.

In what drug-fuelled fantasy do these sycophants live? It does not take the intellect of Einstein nor the reasoning power of Euclid to deduce this is as likely to occur as Kim Jong-il seeing the errors of his ways next Tuesday, closing down all his nuclear facilities and inviting McDonald's to open a chain of stores throughout the country.

The world in general and the UN, Asean and those countries bordering Burma specifically have brazenly betrayed the people of Burma under the cruelly fatuous nonsense of engagement.

China's behaviour of not caring a jot can be expected as it has little concern for its people, having cheerfully announced that Western style democracy would never be allowed to be established in the communist dictatorship. It simply wants raw materials at any cost to keep

the juggernaut of economic progress rolling, as any blip in that might unseat communist control.

India, despite being a democracy, does no better, being presumably motivated by base greed and jealousy of China's gains in resources from Burma, and happily looks the other way while trying to feed from the trough.

The UN is regretfully an excessively expensive, impotent irrelevance, and Asean but a callous collection of dictatorships and faux democracies trying to play on a world stage. All lack the ability, motivation or intention to right this grotesque aberration that blights the modern world.

JOHN SYMONS

BANGKOK

Foreign minister needs reminding of past promises

Re: "Kasit not to resign", News, July 6.

On February 25 it was quoted in Suthichai Yoon's Thai Talk column that Kasit Piromya said he wouldn't resign under pressure. If he is officially charged along with other members of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), he would hand in his resignation and go back on the streets as a political activist again.

Panit Wikitset, vice foreign minister, was quoted this week as saying that Kasit would not stop working and had informed the PM of his intention not to leave office. I hope Khun Panit was misquoted. According to al-Jazeera news on Sunday, the minister was quoted as having said that he would have to resign without doubt. Well, well, well, finally words have caught up with him. Does he belong to the class of "my word is my bond" or "my word has no binding force".

Though I regret his misfortune, as I have started to like his work - especially with his ministry's pursuit of someone on the run and the Cambodian issue - unfortunately he has committed himself too categorically to turn back on his word.

SONGDEJ PRADITSMANONT

BANGKOK

Veera would be left red-faced in an open debate

Re: "Responding to a frivolous challenge", Letters, July 6.

Meechai Burapa compares a political debate with a golf challenge. In his letter, he tries to show us that red-shirt leader Veera Musigapong is as good at debating as Thongchai Jaidee is at golfing, therefore Abhisit's challenge to a political debate is similar to me challenging, say, Tiger Woods to a play-off.

This is not the case here as Veera hasn't got any pedigree or track record of showing he is good at debating political issues with another person. He is good at making speeches maybe, but political debate? I don't think so.

PRINCE SERI

BANGKOK

July 16, 2009 10:10 am (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

The Nation

Print Cancel

Opinion

EDITORIAL
Students offer new dimension on South conflict

Published on July 2, 2009

Graduating class urges govt to give Malay-Muslims more cultural space

For a country that churns out thousands of graduates on an annual basis, the first graduating class of the King Prajadhipok's Institute (KPI) has, indeed, stood out above the rest. The 92 students of KPI's Class 1, who just completed a year-long course on peace and conflict studies, didn't just do the normal course of test, midterms, final exams and thesis or dissertation. They did something that was extremely bold, challenging and meaningful.

Besides their individual course work, collectively these graduate students came up with a set of recommendations for the government, as well as the society at large, as to how the conflict in the deep South should or could be resolved.

Instead of going on about lengthy theoretical studies that tend to put people to sleep, the students encouraged the government to take a proactive peaceful approach to the deep South, a region where the latest wave of insurgency has claimed the lives of nearly 3,500 people since January 2004.

The proposals from the KPI students were not another of the Bangkok-centric, top-down way of looking at the South. The fact that a significant number of the students were from the restive region, as well as members of officials and civil society working on the ground, enabled them to give a perspective different from the typical top-down approach that has failed to curb the violence and bridge the historical mistrust between local Malay Muslims and the Thai state.

Moreover, the presence of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, not to mention hundreds of participants and distinguished guests, was encouraging, as well as a testimony of the importance of their work.

Among other things, they called on the Thai state to grant the Patani Malays cultural space and to stop imposing state-constructed identity on the Muslims there. They urged the state and the society to come to terms with the past by acknowledging the Malays' historical grievances and understand that the nature of the conflict is deep-rooted in Thailand's nation-state building, a process that has been unkind to its minority.

They made it clear that acknowledging these grievances does not in any way constitute a "defeat" on the part of the state as this conflict should not be perceived as a zero-sum game.

Moreover, respected social critic, Dr Prawes Wasi, went so far as to suggest that Thailand should bring back the glorious past of the Malay-speaking region by strengthening the institution of Islamic studies. Believe it or not, this restive region was once the "cradle of Islamic civilisation" in Southeast Asia. The region's glorious past is also our glorious past.

Why is it so hard for our society and state to acknowledge that there are strengths in diversity, these students asked. After all, if we go back far enough, we will see that many of our grandparents came from somewhere else and that this kingdom of ours is truly a melting pot. If anybody is indigenous here, it is the Malays of the deep South.

Besides the question of pride, dignity and glorious past, these students also addressed the issue of political access, or the lack of it, for the local Malays. This means strengthening local institutions, both secular and religious, and permitting Malay to be a working language. Officially, the three southernmost provinces are a part of Thailand. But in reality, many in the rural areas do not speak good enough Thai to get by in a local market, much less the streets of Bangkok, the capital of their country.

As pointed out by Ismail Lutphi Jakpakiya, the rector of Yala Islamic Univeristy, the Malay-Muslims historically grow up with religious authorities around them and many have yet to fully come to terms with the existing administrative and concept of governance imposed upon them by the state.

Many local Malay-Muslims continue to turn to local clerics for advice from family planning to toothache.

Perhaps the boldest idea from the first class has to do with the idea of pushing through a peace process. Indeed, they rightly pointed out that nobody gets anywhere by fighting. The idea of talking to the enemy should be given serious consideration.

Indeed, considering the enormous amount of money and resources, not to mention manpower, poured into this conflict, one has to wonder if this is worth the effort. This is not to suggest that Thailand should cut off the deep South from the rest of the country. KPI's General Ekkachai Srivilas made a convincing argument that the investment has not paid off and now is time to think outside the box. It's not about quantifying but also about justifying these enormous budgets and tens of thousands of troops dispatched to the region, he said.

July 16, 2009 10:26 am (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

The Nation

Print Cancel

National

Mosque culprits 'will be found' : PM

Published on July 1, 2009

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said yesterday the handling of the recent massacre at a Joh I Rong mosque would be a test case for the authorities as they measured local people's faith in the country's justice system.

Speaking at a seminar to commemorate the first graduating class of peace and conflict studies at the King Prajadhipok Institute (KPI), Abhisit said the government would do its utmost to bring the culprits to justice.

About six gunmen shot dead ten Muslims as they were praying inside the Al Furquan mosque in Narathiwat on June 8.

Abhisit said, based on information at hand, there was no evidence to suggest government officials were suspects in the massacre. But if it was established any officials were involved, he would not hesitate to arrest them.

He said his administration respected cultural differences and had not in any way aimed to force the Malay Muslims in the deep South to change their identity or compromise their way of life and religion.

A benchmark for success, said Abhisit, was in counting the number of troops being withdrawn from the region.

Earlier in the day, Thailand's leading social critic, Dr. Prawes Wasi, and the rector of the Yala Islamic University, Ismail Lutphi Japakiya, called on the state to help reinstate the region's status as the "cradle of Islamic teachings" for Southeast Asia.

Both men pointed to a past when the Malay-speaking region was the centre of Islamic studies for Muslims from around the world. Lutphi said such an effort would be a source of pride for the Thai state.

KPI's director, retired General Ekkachai Srivilas, said an enormous amount of budget, resources and manpower had not produced the desired outcome and called for a new and more comprehensive approach.

DSW's Ayub Khan Pathan, said no solution would be successful it did not take into consideration the historical consciousness and the issue of identity of Malays in the region.

Ayub said the state had to acknowledge it was fighting a well organised network of militants and we had failed to win over the local community's support.

July 2, 2009 01:21 pm (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

The Nation

Print Cancel

Opinion

General fights violence in South with green revolution

Published on July 1, 2009

On June 24, we woke up early to be ready for a morning tour with Lt-General Phichet Visaijorn, the commander of the Fourth Army Region. The general, who still has two years left in his military career, was a very strong man. He had woken up before us to prepare for the long day. As a hands-on man, he liked to mingle with the Muslim-Thai people. "I have told my staff that if we wave our hands to the people wherever we go, and they do not respond, then it means that we must be doing something wrong," he said.

We went out for breakfast. A caravan of vehicles led us from the Sirindhorn military base in Pattani, which lies at the border with Yala.

Pretty soon, we reached an intersection of Ban Nieng, Amphoe Muang, Yala. We had breakfast at a cafe right near the intersection. The owner and his son, who spoke in heavily accented Thai, took good care of us. They served a very special kind of khao soi with rice and vegetables. Their old-fashioned coffee and tea were tasty. This cafe used to be a target of terrorist attacks. The son showed me a hole made by a bullet in a glass panel. "We do not want to fix it yet. But the situation has vastly improved," he said.

Everywhere Lt-General Phichet went, the local Muslim people would flock to him. They somehow saw in him a leadership quality that could bring peace and stability back to the three southern provinces. He was more like a movie star. |Phichet sat at the same table with the local Muslim people and made friends with them. There was no gap at all. This brought about trust among the local Muslims. The owner of the cafe shop proudly showed us a picture of him with the general and other members of the community.

A lady who joined us at the table said after the general's arrival on the scene, the situation and morale had improved.

It was clear that Lt-General Phichet was trying to win the hearts and minds of the local Muslim people. He would like to be friendly with them. And if they were to need anything, he would respond quickly. The military option was only used when it was necessary to fend off the insurgents. On the ground, the violence remained grave. The military had to bring the violent areas under control. If they were to withdraw, the insurgents would have returned to occupy one village after another.

Then we went in a helicopter to Ban Hutaemajae in Amphoe Waeng, Narathiwat, where rice plantation was about to be revived. Lt-General Phichet had introduced effective micro-organisations or EM fertiliser to the South. Ban Hutaemajae was one of the projects under the economic-sufficiency programme.

Several hundred villagers were on hand to greet the general and his delegation. The ladies wore beautiful dresses in different bright colours. There were shows to entertain the participants, from dancing, water play and other activities. It was a rare event for the local Muslims, who did not have many opportunities to enjoy themselves due to the spate of violence.

Most of the Muslim people were engaged in rubber plantation. The sufficiency-economy programme will introduce rice plantation to them so that they can live on their land without having to buy rice or other food stuff. Lt-General Phichet has successfully introduced organic fertiliser to the Northeast, where he previously served as commander of the Second Army Region. Crop yields from using organic fertiliser quadrupled. Likewise, when organic fertiliser is used for rubber plants, it helps to increase yield manifold.

The local Muslims, 44 of them from Ban Bangotuebnu, have also taken part in the rice-plantation project using organic fertiliser. Each is involved in rice plantation, from one to four rai of land. As for the Muslims in Ban Hutaemajae, the number of the participants was 55. They looked happy that they would be doing rice farming, which would help increase their income and also make them sufficient in food.

The barren rice fields were being revived. When you talk to the local Muslim people, you immediately find out that they are very nice people. They would like to have a good and normal life.

July 1, 2009 03:04 pm (Thai local time)
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