



Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

**NEWSCLIPPINGS AND ARTICLES
ON
POLITICAL CONFLICT**

August 1 - 15, 2009

**INFORMATION SERVICES DIVISION
ISIS MALAYSIA**

MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2009

Malaysia detains dozens after weekend protest

BY JAMES HOOKWAY
AND CELINE FERNANDEZ

Malaysia detained dozens of antigovernment protesters on Sunday following a sweeping weekend demonstration in Kuala Lumpur that raised the stakes in a long-running struggle for political power in the country.

On Saturday, riot police fired tear gas and water cannons during clashes with thousands of demonstrators who were protesting a longstanding law allowing detention without trial.

The law—known as the Internal Security Act—enables Malaysian authorities to detain indefinitely individuals they consider to be security risks. In the past, al Qaeda-linked terrorists have been held under the provision.

Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim and human-rights activists say the law also is used to stifle dissent in Malaysia, where the National Front coalition has ruled the country without interruption since independence from Britain in 1957. The law represents a “powerful threat to anybody criticizing the government,” Mr. Anwar said in a phone interview.

Last year, the law was used to detain a blogger, a journalist and members of a Hindu-rights activist group.

On Saturday, as many as 10,000 protesters converged in the center of Malaysia’s main city just after two o’clock in the afternoon, intending to march to the national palace, where they planned to submit a petition to the country’s constitutional monarch to repeal the security law. Chants of “*Reformasi*”—the Malaysian term for political reform—echoed through the narrow streets of downtown Kuala Lumpur as police fired tear gas to break up the protesters before the march began.

Police used batons to charge into groups of demonstrators, scuffling with many of them before

they could deliver the petition. Analysts said the showdown could buoy Mr. Anwar’s opposition alliance in its effort to win enough support to form a new government.

Some protesters fled to a nearby department store to evade arrest. A number of businesses pulled down their shutters as concerns about violence grew. Witnesses say they saw police dragging detainees into vans, sometimes kicking and screaming.

Inspector General of Police Musa Haji Hassan said in a statement Saturday that police arrested 310 protesters because the rally hadn’t been granted a permit.

“Because of their defiance, police were left no choice but to disperse them by spraying tear gas and throwing water at the demonstrators,” Mr. Musa said. The number of detainees was later revised up to 438.

As of late Sunday, 39 protesters remained in custody, an opposition lawyer told the Associated Press.

Mr. Anwar, the 61-year-old opposition leader, said the police response to the demonstration indicated that the government is trying to batten down the hatches against growing distrust in the way Malaysia’s political leaders use colonial-era laws such as the Internal Security Act.

“The way the police acted reflects the government’s fear. Even people who were dispersing after the protest was broken up were fired on with tear gas,” said Mr. Anwar, who attended the rally.

State media reported that Prime Minister Najib Razak said the protesters had been warned not to assemble, and said he had received many complaints about traffic disruptions in the area. Mr. Najib said he would leave it to the police to determine what to do with the people detained during the protest. In the past, he has pledged to consider amending the Internal Security Act.

Other government officials and political activists have said the internal security law is needed to combat terrorism and maintain social order in this diverse nation of 27 million people, which is home to large ethnic-Chinese and -Indian minorities as well as the majority Muslim Malay population.

Political analysts said the manner in which Saturday’s protests were broken up could give Mr. Anwar and his fragile opposition alliance a boost at a time when Mr. Najib has been gaining public approval. The prime minister’s approval rating in a recent opinion poll climbed to 65% in July from 45% in May. After a series of electoral reverses over the past year, the ruling National Front saw its margin of loss narrow in the most recent provincial election last month.

James Chin, a political-science professor at the Malaysian campus of Australia’s Monash University, said that despite those gains, the rally was intended to “send a strong signal to the rest of the world that nothing has changed in Malaysia” in terms of human rights in recent years.

A number of political analysts say Malaysia’s tension seems in many ways to be a retread of events a decade ago, when Mr. Anwar, then a deputy prime minister, was fired from the government for questioning its economic policies. Mr. Anwar then was convicted of allegedly sodomizing two male aides—a crime in this mostly Muslim country.

Mr. Anwar’s conviction was overturned after a successful appeal in 2004, enabling him to return to politics.

Last year, as the opposition made its largest-ever election gains, Mr. Anwar was charged with sodomizing a man who once worked in his office.

Mr. Anwar says he is not guilty in both cases, saying the charges were fabricated by political enemies, whom he didn’t identify, to destroy his political career.

Mr. Najib, the prime minister, has denied playing any role in instigating the case against Mr. Anwar.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2009

Malaysian Evasion

Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak promised in April that his government would conduct a "comprehensive review"

of the Internal Security Act, a colonial-era law that allows indefinite detention without trial. On Saturday, 10,000 Malaysians marched in the streets of Kuala Lumpur to hold him to his word, asking him to abolish the act. They were soon dispersed with tear gas and water cannons, and 589 people were arrested.

The confrontation marks a turning point for Mr. Najib's administration, which until now has refrained from employing roughshod tactics against politi-

cal opponents. Earlier he won praise for releasing 26 ISA detainees and using that law to detain terrorists, not politicians or journalists as his predecessor did.

The Prime Minister should abolish the ISA.

But even given that restraint, Malaysians increasingly want a more transparent and freer society. Saturday's protest was nominally about the ISA, and it was organized by Abolish the ISA Movement, a human-rights group, along with other NGOs. But it was also a larger vote of dissatisfaction with the government's decision to press ahead with a show trial of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim and the unexplained death last month of a

young opposition political aide following several hours of interrogation by anti-corruption officials. Politicians from all three opposition parties were present at the protest, including Mr. Anwar.

Malaysia's constitution guarantees the right to free speech and assembly. But police set up barricades and checkpoints on Friday to prevent crowds from gathering, and launched teargas Saturday before the march began. Under Malaysian law, street gatherings of more than five people are automatically illegal because they require a permit—which in practice is almost never granted. The prime minister's office and the home office declined to comment to us yesterday, and the police didn't return our calls.

Mr. Najib would be better served by embracing the protestors' cause. Abolishing the ISA would not only benefit Malaysians—who would still be protected from terrorists by a host of other detention laws—but would also deny Mr. Anwar's opposition coalition one of its key rallying points. Arresting opposition leaders, as police did Saturday, only augments their popularity.

Mr. Najib has so far proved to be a savvy leader and boosted his popularity ratings by introducing a series of reforms that begin to tackle Malaysia's affirmative action policies. If he wants to demonstrate his reform bona fides he could start by listening to those protesters instead of chasing them away.

Pyongyang's Blackmail Diplomacy

By Andrei Lankov

After months of insisting negotiations with the "American imperialist warmongers" are useless and humiliating, Pyongyang has suddenly changed its tune. North Korea's ambassador to the United Nations said late last month: "We are not against a dialogue. We are not against any negotiation for the issues of common concern." The North confirmed it would accept bilateral talks with the United States while rejecting the continuation of the "useless" six-party talks. Finally, when a South Korean boat inadvertently crossed into North Korean waters, Pyongyang reacted cooperatively.

These events were welcomed worldwide as grounds for hope that a seemingly dangerous crisis will soon be over. Pyongyang's recent moves are comforting, but for a different reason: These diplomatic gestures confirm that, contrary to fears of some Pyongyang watchers, there was nothing unusual in the regime's recent antics. It was just another round of the old game that has served Kim Jong Il's clique for decades.

Since North Korea's semi-Stalinist economy cannot meet the most basic demands of the population, the regime needs aid from the outside world. The best kind of

aid from Kim's perspective is unconditional, so it can be distributed, above all, among the regime's faithful, thus helping the ruling family to stay in power.

Pyongyang's leaders always use the same trick to acquire this aid. First, they manufacture a crisis and drive tensions as high as possible. In the early 1990s, they leaked information about their nuclear weapons program and openly threatened to turn Seoul "into a sea of fire." In 2006, they staged a nuclear test.

Earlier this year, they launched ballistic missiles and conducted a second nuclear test. Once tensions are sufficiently high, the North Koreans suggest negotiations and squeeze maximum concessions out of their negotiating partners to restore the pre-crisis status quo.

So far, the strategy has worked well. In 1994 a consortium led by the U.S., South Korea and Japan gave the North generous amounts of aid. In 2007, the Bush administration returned to the six-party talks it had steadfastly rejected for years—which led to more payoffs to Pyongyang, of course. When the current crisis began, it was assumed that this time, North Korea was using the same tactics to counter an obvious tendency of the Obama adminis-

tration to treat Pyongyang with "benign neglect."

The unusually high intensity of recent provocations made observers suspect that Pyongyang's erratic behavior was being driven by something new—perhaps by domestic considerations such as a leadership transition. The recent diplomatic maneuvers, however, confirm that the North was just engaging in yet another case of blackmail.

It will take some time before the North Koreans present their exact demands, but they will definitely request more aid and more political concessions. The proposed switch to bilateral talks with the U.S. is also good for them. The six-party talks create a (partially fictional) united front of neighboring powers, and thus deprive Pyongyang of many opportunities to play countries like Japan and South Korea against one another.

Washington and the other four parties need to be careful and cool-minded. In the long run, talks with the North are unavoidable. Talk about "isolating Pyongyang" is naive: Regimes of this type actually thrive in isolation and are corroded by outside contact. A channel of communication should be kept open in anticipation of dra-

matic changes in Pyongyang; recent photos clearly indicate that the Dear Leader has health problems.

If the Obama administration gives too much and too quickly, it will reinforce Pyongyang's belief that blackmail is the best way to conduct diplomacy. A rush back to the bargaining table will ensure that in a few years' time, Pyongyang will stage another wave of provocations.

It is also important to have realistic expectations about future talks. As long as the Kim family stays in power, the North will not seriously consider denuclearization, even though it might hint otherwise to lure foreign partners into concessions. So the real goal of the talks should not be the impossible task of denuclearization but a set of more realistic goals of reducing proliferation risks and maintaining stability.

It is time to demonstrate to Pyongyang's negotiators that they are not in full control of the situation. Maybe then, for a change, Kim will learn that blackmail diplomacy does not necessarily bring immediate and hefty rewards.

Mr. Lankov is an associate professor of history at Kookmin University in Seoul, a research fellow at the Australian National University in Canberra and author of "North of the DMZ" (McFarland, 2007).

**The North
is reverting
to form.**

What's Different About the Obama Foreign Policy?

By Eliot Cohen

President Barack Obama has put some miles on Air Force One. He and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have made major foreign policy speeches. The national security team is in place. It's time to make a preliminary judgment about Mr. Obama and the world. Just how different is this administration's foreign policy from its predecessor? And will such departures where they exist make much difference?

Set aside the administration's conceit of "smart power" because only fools (read: Team Obama's predecessors) would prefer stupid power. Continuity is the dominant note.

The Iraq drawdown moves more quickly and definitively than the Bush administration had desired, but it is not the repudiation the folks from MoveOn.org desired. The Bush-appointed Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and his Bush-promoted generals have implemented a build-up in Afghanistan that began in the last years of the previous administration. Strikes within Pakistan from unmanned aerial vehicles continue, and the administration reassuringly laces its rhetoric about al Qaeda with words like "eliminate," "destroy" and "kill."

Relationships with Europe have warmed. But that defrosting also began in the last years of the Bush administration, as it secured an increase in French forces in Afghanistan while easing that country's re-entry into NATO and backed a European-led response to the Russian invasion of Georgia.

Middle East peace process? Sure. Special envoys instead of large peace conferences, but the idea is the same. Multinational diplomacy? Continuity there too, judging by the stacks of ineffective U.N. resolutions on North Korea and Iran. Increased emphasis on foreign aid? We will see if the Obama administration can top the large and effective AIDS relief effort in Africa launched by President George W. Bush.

The rhetoric about the core of American foreign policy also remains consistent. Consider Mrs. Clinton's recent speech at the Council on Foreign Relations. "The question is not whether our nation can or should lead, but how it will lead in the 21st century." Not much bashfulness about American pre-eminence there. "We will not hesitate to defend our friends, our inter-

ests, and above all, our people vigorously and when necessary with the world's strongest military." Suspiciously muscular. And what animates the whole? "Liberty, democracy, justice and opportunity underlie our priorities." Hardly Metternichean realism.

As for modesty about what America can do, Mrs. Clinton said this: "More than 230 years ago, Thomas Paine said, 'We have it within our power to start the world over again.' Today, in a new and very different era, we are called upon to use that power." Sentiments to make an unrepentant neoconservative blush.

A few differences, however, do stand out. Mr. Obama has pledged to close Gitmo, once he figures out what to do with the enemy combatants detained there. Whereas the Bush administration only grudgingly accepted the perils of climate change, preferring the invisible hand of high energy prices and entrepreneurial innovation to combat it, the Obama administration has embraced cap and trade, with windfalls to favored clients and hidden taxes galore. It remains to be seen how Team Obama will bring the burgeoning Indian and Chinese economies into a system of controls.

The Obama administration has shunned a free trade agreement with a critical democratic ally, Colombia, out of deference to its union constituencies—even as it tries to mend fences with Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. It decided to begin its Middle East peacemaking by picking a gratuitous fight with another close ally, Israel.

It has also committed itself to the fantastic notion of abolishing nuclear weapons. It took the first step along that path to nowhere by starting an arms control process with Russia, without any evidence that doing so would produce Russian cooperation on anything at all, although it would further degrade America's nuclear arsenal.

Mostly, though, the underlying structure of the policy remains the same. Nor should this surprise us: The United States has interests dictated by its physical location, its economy, its alliances and, above all, its values. Naïve realists, a large tribe, fail to understand that ideals will inevitably guide American foreign policy, even if they do not always determine it. Moreover, because the Obama foreign and defense policy senior team consists of centrist ex-

perts from the Democratic Party, it is unlikely to make radically different judgments about the world, and about American interests in it, than its predecessors.

Differences in the execution of policy, however, make all the difference. Take, for example, outreach to Iran.

The Bush administration mulled this, and even tried it, diplomats warily meeting Iranians in various venues. But when Mr. Obama said to the leaders of Iran and other despots, "We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist" he did not expect to find the Supreme Leader's paws sticky with the blood of freshly slaughtered protesters. Remarkably, rather than adjust the policy, the administration almost immediately released five Iranian "diplomats"—in truth, members of the Revolutionary Guard Corps—that we held in Iraq.

The Iranian policy shows a faith in diplomacy that might be understandable coming from process-obsessed diplomats.

But this policy will soon encounter the reality, a looming choice between war with Iran or acceptance of its status as a nuclear power. Is the administration prepared to act if diplomacy fails, as so often it does?

The confidence in diplomacy reflects a deeper theme here, namely, the repudiation of the Bush era. Even as stubborn facts cause the administration to claim many of the same executive privileges (e.g., a proper secrecy about some CIA activities) as its predecessor and continue or expand the same policies, it suffers from its desire to be un-Bush.

Believing (incorrectly) that the Bush administration did not do diplomacy, it does so promiscuously, complete with such tomfoolery as a misspelled reset button given to the Russian foreign minister. Abhorring Mr. Bush's freedom agenda, it will avoid anything of the kind until, of course, being Americans, the president, the vice president or the secretary of state blurt out their faith in universal ideals and their indignation at the behavior of thugs, dictators and tyrants.

The biggest difference between the Obama and Bush administrations, though, is Messrs. Obama and Bush, or rather, their images at home and abroad. Mr. Obama is popular, and he dominates American foreign policy.

Brimming with confidence in his abilities and certain of the rightness of his views, he has undertaken a wildly ambitious agenda at home and abroad. He will bring peace between Arab and Israeli, wean Iran from its nuclear ambitions, restructure the international financial system, set us on the path to the abolition of nuclear weapons, reconcile Islam and Christianity, and end global warming, while introducing universal health care at home and bringing the country out of the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Lord Salisbury, British prime minister and foreign secretary in the last years of the 19th century, famously defined foreign policy as the art of drifting "lazily down a stream occasionally putting out a diplomatic boat-hook to avoid collisions." This does not suit our times. But the patter of applause from a press whose sycophancy would embarrass a Renaissance court should not hide the dangers inherent in Mr. Obama's style, which is characterized by an easy assumption of foreign policy omniscience and omnimcompetence.

Some of his ambitions will come crashing into ruin, and surely ghastly surprises lie athwart our path. The Bush administration, many of its critics said, fell victim to hubris, the fatal arrogance punished, according to the ancients, by the goddess Nemesis. The Greeks would understand the irony if we discovered that cold-eyed lady, always hovering closer than politicians realize, turning an increasingly disapproving gaze on today's White House.

Mr. Cohen teaches at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. He served as counselor of the State Department during the last two years of the George W. Bush administration.



U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and President Barack Obama

Mr. Clinton Goes to Pyongyang

By Gordon C. Chang

Bill Clinton arrived in Pyongyang yesterday to seek the release of two American journalists. But as serious as their plight is, it's important to understand at what cost their freedom may be won.

Laura Ling and Euna Lee were reporting on refugees at the time of their detention in mid-March and were sentenced in June to 12 years of hard labor for crossing into North Korean territory. Back-channel negotiations have gone on for months between Washington and North Korea over the fate of the two women, and it appears unlikely that the former president would risk making this high-profile trip unless some understanding had been reached beforehand. North Korean media reported yesterday that Mr. Clinton had met with Kim Jong Il.

We may never know what Obama administration officials have said to the North Koreans behind closed doors, but the North Koreans apparently have been demanding an apology from the United States for the reporters' alleged border incursion. Many believe this demand led Secretary of State Hillary Clinton last month to call on Pyongyang for "amnesty," an implicit admission of the reporters' guilt. What other concessions has the Obama administration been willing to make to secure the release of Ms. Ling and Ms. Lee?

Rumors have been circulating in Washington for several months that the two countries have been talking about nuclear issues at the same time they have been discussing the two journalists. These reports now appear to be true. Kim Kye Gwan, North Korea's chief nuclear negotiator, was on hand at the airport in Pyongyang to greet Mr. Clinton as he arrived for

a visit intended to discuss the reporters—a clear sign Pyongyang, at least, is linking the two issues.

This marks a significant break with previous U.S. policy. During the last years of the Bush administration, the State Department constantly warned Tokyo's diplomats that concerns over Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea shouldn't interfere with American initiatives to resolve the nuclear problem. Now it appears Washington has let its concern over the two journalists undercut efforts to denuclearize the in-

creasingly dangerous North Korean regime.

Mr. Clinton's arrival in the North Korean capital is giving rise to hopes that he can broker a durable agreement where others—including himself—have failed. That's highly improbable for many reasons. North Korean leader Kim Jong Il appears to be suffering from numerous life-threatening ailments, including kidney failure and pancreatic cancer. It's impossible to know for sure, but he has probably ceded powers to hardline generals to obtain the support of the military for succession to one of his sons, the 26-year-old Kim Jong Un. The Chinese have recently stepped up trade to North Korea to help tide the regime over a particularly difficult period, thereby giving it the means to ride out the latest rounds of the United Nations Security Council's slap-on-the-wrist sanctions.

So now is not the time to throw Kim a lifeline. Another former president, Jimmy Carter, did just that when he made his own surprise visit to Pyongyang in June 1994. On that visit, Mr. Carter developed the outline of the Agreed Framework,

which contemplated supplying light-water nuclear reactors to Kim in return for a freeze of his nuclear program and its eventual dismantlement. Mr. Clinton, against the advice of then South Korean President Kim Young-sam, accepted that arrangement, which not only provided material assistance to Pyongyang but also signified American acceptance of the regime immediately after the death of founder Kim Il Sung. Messrs. Carter and Clinton effectively squandered North Korea's most vulnerable moment since the Korean War.

Thanks in part to failed diplomacy in the Clinton and Bush administrations,

nal of atomic weapons. Kim, like his father Kim Il Sung, has broken every promise he's ever made with respect to the nuclear program.

And now there is one more reason for the regime to continue alarming conduct. Mr. Clinton, in conducting any nuclear discussions now, would be rewarding Pyongyang for jailing the two reporters and making them bargaining chips in high-stakes negotiations. So, in the future, Kim might think he can get away with anything else he wants by just grabbing more victims.

This matters because Ms. Ling and Ms. Lee are not Pyongyang's only hostages. In March, North Korea detained Yu Song-jin, a South Korean manager working in the Kaesong industrial zone, for criticizing Kim's paradise. Last week, a North Korean patrol boat seized a South Korean fishing vessel that accidentally strayed into the North's waters, and Pyongyang is now keeping the four-member crew for no good reason. At this time North Korea may be holding 100 or more Japanese abductees and at least 1,000 South Koreans, some of them prisoners from the Korean War and others kidnapped since then. And most broadly, Kim uses all his 23 million people as hostages.

Everyone wants the two American journalists back safely. But the U.S. can't afford to secure their release at any cost, especially if that price is further negotiations that will only give Kim more time to perfect his nuclear arsenal, develop his ballistic missiles, and give him even more incentive to take foreign hostages.

Mr. Chang is the author of "Nuclear Showdown: North Korea Takes On the World" (Random House, 2006).

Freeing journalists, but at what cost?



Touchdown: Clinton on the tarmac in Pyongyang.

there is almost no room left for the U.S. to make additional concessions to North Korea over its nuclear program. Pyongyang last year broke off the so-called six-party denuclearization talks, which began in 2003 after the North admitted violating the Agreed Framework. Pyongyang refused to verify its promises to dismantle its nuclear facilities and give up its small arse-

Smarter North Korean Diplomacy

By Stephen Yates
And Christian Whiton

As the world turns its gaze to Euna Lee and Laura Ling's homecoming from North Korea, courtesy of former President Bill Clinton's surprise trip, it is important to remember hard realities that remain unchanged. Others unjustly detained or abducted remain missing. The tragic condition of the North Korean people is not improved. And then there is the profound challenge North Korean provocations present to international security.

The two prior U.S. administrations engaged in prolonged discussions with Pyongyang and provided aid in return for false promises to end its nuclear program. Mr. Clinton's visit has continued the pattern of rewarding Pyongyang for bad behavior. Instead, the U.S. and its allies should counter the growing threat by recalibrating strategic defense and deterrence in the region by creating a formal planning group. This will both be good for America's alliances in the region and put useful pressure on Pyongyang during any future talks.

America's possession of nuclear weapons is often taken as an ample deterrent in and of itself. Select allies are assured that they stand beneath a U.S. nuclear umbrella. But this counts for little if the relevant systems, training and authorities to use force in practice are not established in advance of a crisis. The situation today is similar to that of the early 1960s, when some European allies doubted the will and ability of the U.S. to retaliate rapidly in reaction to a Soviet attack—and thus to deter such an attack in the first place.

Because deterrence lacked specificity and credibility, NATO established the Nuclear Planning Group. This brought America's allies to the table on matters such as where, when and how American and the alliance would respond to a Soviet attack. The allies then deployed weapons matched appropriately with the threat of various Soviet systems. These military steps were

critical to ensure allies would be confident of America's contribution to their defense, enabling them to stand with the U.S. politically on other issues.

A similar defensive step is necessary today. The U.S. should make strategic defense and nuclear deterrence real enough for allies to feel secure and forgo nuclear weapons themselves. America and its allies need a Nuclear and Strategic Planning Group for East Asia, starting with Japan and then including other democratic countries.

Such a group need not confine itself solely to traditional nuclear deterrence.

Thanks to advances in missile defense technology, the group's primary concern could be about "deterrence by denial." This would involve coordinated and set plans to disable any ballistic missile or space launch vehicle coming from North Korea. A planning group would also provide another platform to discuss with the Chinese government the ways its own offensive capabilities will be negatively affected by the misconduct of its client government in Pyongyang. Only when this happens is Beijing likely to exert significant pressure on the North Korean regime to disarm.

Far from precluding diplomacy, the establishment of a planning group in the region would actually improve the chances for diplomatic progress by making aggression more costly and less likely to succeed. This step has a better chance of preventing the emergence of new nuclear states and establishing greater security than does utopian talk of nuclear disarmament or presuming North Korea can be bargained out of its nuclear arsenal.

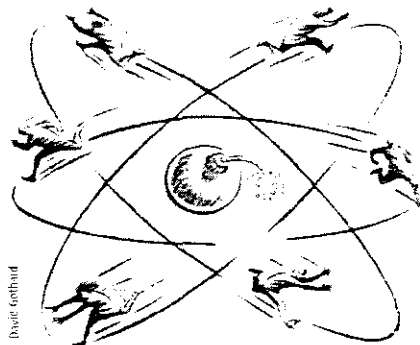
Some in the U.S. administration are watching this threat. Kurt Campbell, the new top U.S. diplomat for East Asia, recently announced on his inaugural trip to Japan that Washington and Tokyo would commence a "deep discussion about the elements of nuclear deterrence." That Japan has determined it must now talk seriously about nuclear deterrence is telling of how the North Korean threat has grown. The emergence of a nuclear-armed North Korea is more dangerous than the India-Pakistan nuclear breakout of the 1990s, given the nature and track record of the Pyongyang regime, with its long history of proliferation and its unstable leadership.

An initiative like this can also act as a model for strategic defense and deterrence in the Middle East. In July, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton floated the idea of a defense umbrella over Gulf allies if Iran at-

tains a nuclear weapon. However, trial balloons like this are just the first step to a well-planned and rehearsed defense arrangement that can be called upon in the hours or minutes afforded security officials in modern crises. Much more work is necessary.

Appearances to the contrary, the old-style diplo-

macy on display during Mr. Clinton's visit will not lead the way to better security in Northeast Asia. Better marshaling missile defenses and America's nuclear deterrent through planning with U.S. allies will



David Gehring

Mr. Yates was deputy national security adviser to the vice president from 2001 to 2005. Mr. Whiton was a State Department senior adviser from 2003 to 2006 and served as deputy special envoy for North Korean human rights issues. They are, respectively, the president and senior adviser of D.C. Asia Advisory LLC.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 2009

The Global War on Terror, Cont.

The Obama Administration may have erased the phrase “global war on terror” from the American political lexicon, but the threat remains very real to countries around the globe. For the latest reminder, look to Australia.

On Tuesday, authorities Down Under detained five suspects alleged to be plotting a suicide mission against a military base in the Sydney suburbs. In a press conference, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd claimed the men were linked to al Shabaab, a Somali terrorist group with ties to al Qaeda.

If true, that means that Australians are now dealing with a brand new African front to their war on terror. But like Washington, Canberra was already facing a global menace. In Indonesia in

recent years, jihadists have killed 92 Australian tourists in two successive attacks in Bali, attacked the Australian embassy in Jakarta and killed three in a hotel bombing.

The threat at home is equally grave. Since 2002, authorities have foiled plots to attack a nuclear facility, the national electricity grid and packed sporting events. Acting Australian Federal Police Commissioner Tony Negus said this week the alleged attack against the Sydney military base, if successful, would have been the most serious terrorist action in the country's history.

Australia's leftists—like their American peers—claim that terrorism would

magically disappear if Canberra stopped fighting the war in Afghanistan and broke its close alliance with

Washington. Mr. Rudd put paid to those arguments Tuesday: “If we are to deal with the threat of terrorism at its various levels, we must be dealing with where terrorists are trained, we must be dealing with those who sup-

port them, as we must be dealing with the current, practical challenges which confront our law enforcement agencies here in Australia.”

That last bit is what makes Australia's global war on terror so unlike America's: Its two main political parties practice broad and open bipartisanship when it comes to enforcing an-

Australia's
latest alleged
plot is only one
of many.

titerror laws when it counts.

Mr. Rudd hails from the left-leaning Labor Party, many members of which pushed back hard when the former Liberal government implemented legislation to pre-emptively detain and prosecute alleged terrorists. But after taking office, Mr. Rudd hasn't hesitated to let his security forces use these laws to the fullest—and hasn't criticized the former government's practices.

That kind of bipartisanship takes political nerve. But it's also a recognition that fighting terrorism is an ongoing, shifting battle with high stakes, and citizens want to feel equally protected by left and right-leaning governments alike. Australia may have foiled a big attack on Tuesday. But the global war on terror continues.

Arroyo's Mindanao Gamble

President Obama endorsed Manila's renewed talks with separatists on its southern island of Mindanao last week, saying they had "the potential to bring peace and stability to a part of the Philippines that has been wracked by unrest for too long." But without keeping the focus on security, that kind of thinking may represent a triumph of hope over experience.

Mindanao is home to al Qaeda-linked terrorist groups that plot operations abroad, and a 30-year ethnic insurgency against the government in Manila. Like her predecessors, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has used a mix of military action and jawboning to pacify the main domestic sep-

aratist group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and bring order to the island. Late last month, she launched another attempt at talks.

**Talks must be
backed by
credible
military action.**

The MILF has never been a reliable negotiating partner. Although a cease-fire was nominally in place between 2003 and last August, violations by MILF thugs were routine whenever the group didn't like the way settlement negotiations were going. A 2008 deal to create a largely au-

tonomous MILF-controlled "homeland" fell apart last August after a challenge to its constitutionality. Alleged MILF members went on a rampage, killing dozens and forcing thousands of civilians to flee their homes. MILF leaders said they hadn't sanctioned the violence. Either

they were lying or they were no longer in control of the group's most violent members. Neither bodes well for future talks.

Meanwhile in Manila, Mrs. Arroyo and others have struggled to summon the political will to win the war against the separatists militarily or at least to negotiate a credible deal. That doesn't mean progress is impossible. But talks in the past haven't worked because Manila has given concessions without first establishing disincentives to violence.

Mrs. Arroyo can take a different tack this time. Last month's cease-fire technically covers only military operations conducted against the MILF proper. "Policing operations" against supposedly rogue MILF generals are allowed, and reportedly are ongoing. This is critical because two of the three "rogues," known

by their noms de guerre Kato and Bravo, appear to be responsible for the worst of the violence. Manila could also further embrace the presence of U.S. troops, who have trained local forces and fight terrorism in the region.

Mindanao is a serious problem for the Philippines and its neighbors. The experiences of Afghanistan and Colombia highlight the dangers of leaving vast swathes of land largely untouched by government law and order. Mrs. Arroyo should not court a similar fate for the Philippines by imagining the MILF can be pacified by reason alone.

Burma Isn't Broke

By Sean Turnell

The drawn-out show trial of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi has once again focused attention on Burma and sparked discussion on how to engage the regime. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently suggested development aid as a carrot to coax the generals to talk. But contrary to popular belief, the junta isn't as poor as it claims to be.

Burma has emerged as a major regional supplier of natural gas in Asia-Pacific. At present, most of this gas is sold to Thailand, but new fields will shortly provide for vast sales to China. Rising gas prices and increasing demand have caused the value of

Burma's gas exports to soar, driving a projected balance-of-payments surplus for this fiscal year of around \$2.5 billion. Burma's international reserves will rise to over \$5 billion-worth by the end of the year.

These revenues make next to no impact on the country's official fiscal accounts, however. The reason is simple: Burma's U.S. dollar gas earnings are recorded in the government's published accounts at the local currency's "official" exchange

**The junta,
not a lack of
resources, is to
blame for the
people's
poverty.**

rate of around six kyat to a dollar. This rate overvalues the currency by nearly 200 times its market value and undervalues the local-currency value of Burma's gas earnings by an equivalent amount. Recorded at the official rate, Burma's gas earnings translate into less than 1% of budget receipts. By contrast, if

the same gas earnings are recorded at the market exchange rate, their contribution would more than double total state receipts, and largely eliminate Burma's fiscal deficit.

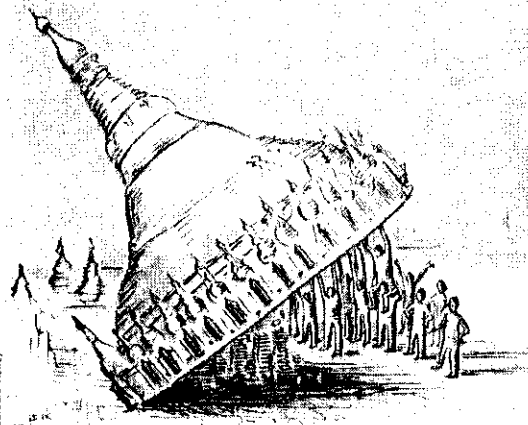
The motivation for this sleight of hand is probably to "quarantine" Burma's foreign exchange earnings

from the country's public accounts, thereby making them available to the regime and its cronies. This accounting is facilitated by Burma's state-owned Foreign Trade Bank and some willing offshore banks.

Flush with these funds, Burma's military rulers have embarked upon a spending binge of epic proportions, including indulging themselves in the creation of a new administrative capital named Naypyidaw, or

"abode of kings." They are also buying nuclear technologies of uncertain use from Russia and possibly from North Korea.

This kind of behavior is par for the course in Burma. The military junta took power in a 1962 coup and has consistently



unpredictable and ill-informed. The regime spends greatly in excess of its revenue and resorts to the printing presses to finance its spending, creating inflation. Most of Burma's prominent corporations are owned by the military, and the country is judged by Transparency International as the second most corrupt in the world.

Burma's fall from grace has been incredible to watch. The country was once one of the richest in Southeast Asia and the world's largest rice exporter. Today, Burma can barely feed itself. In 1950, the per capita of GDP of Burma and its neighbor, Thailand, were virtually identical. Today, Thailand's GDP is seven times that of its former peer, despite very similar religious, cultural and physical endowments.

The people of Burma are poor, but the regime that oppresses them is not. Changing this equation is the true key to economic development in Burma, and the outcome to which the efforts of the rest of the world should be directed.

Mr. Turnell is the editor of Burma Economic Watch and an associate professor in economics at Macquarie University in Sydney.

Autocracy and the Decline of the Arabs

By Fouad Ajami

"It made me feel so jealous," said Abdulmonem Ibrahim, a young Egyptian political activist, of the recent upheaval in Iran. "We are amazed at the organization and speed with which the Iranian movement has been functioning. In Egypt you can count the number of activists on your hand." This degree of "Iran envy" is a telling statement on the stagnation of Arab politics. It is not pretty, Iran's upheaval, but grant the Iranians their due: They have gone out into the streets to contest the writ of the theocrats.

In contrast, little has stirred in Arab politics of late. The Arabs, by their own testimony, have become spectators to their history. A struggle rages between the Iranian theocracy and the Pax Americana for primacy in the Persian Gulf and the Levant. The Arabs have the demography—360 million people by latest count—and the wealth to balance Iran's power. But they have taken a pass in the hope that America—or Israel, for that matter—would shatter the Iranian bid for hegemony.

We are now in the midst of one of those periodic autopsies of the Arab condition. The trigger is the publication last month of the Arab Human Development Report 2009, the fifth of a series of reports by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on the state of the contemporary Arab world.

The first of these reports, published in 2002, was treated with deference. A group of Arab truth-tellers, it was believed, had broken with the evasions and the apologies to tell of the sordid condition of Arab

society—the autocratic political culture, the economic stagnation, the cultural decay. So all Arabs combined had a smaller manufacturing capacity than Finland with its five million people, and a vast Arabic-speaking world translated into Arabic a fifth of the foreign books that Greece with its 11 million people translates. With all the oil in the region, tens of millions of Arabs were living below the poverty line.

Little has altered in the years separating the first of these reports from the most recent. A huge oil windfall came into the region, and it was better handled, it has to be conceded, than earlier oil windfalls. But on balance the grief of the Arabs has deepened, and the autocracies are yet to be brought to account. They remain unloved, but they remain in the saddle.

In a clever turn of phrase, The Economist recently wrote of an Arab Rip Abu Winkle awakening from a slumber into which he had fallen in the early 1980s to marvel at how little has changed. He would find Hosni Mubarak still at the helm in Cairo, the policeman Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Moammar Gadhafi in Libya. He would miss Hafez Assad in Damascus, but he would be reassured that his son Bashar had inherited his father's dominion. He would of course find the same dynasties in Jordan and in the Arab states of the Peninsula and the Gulf.

Wily rulers, the men at the helm may have failed their peoples. They may have denied them decent educational systems. They may not have figured out a way into the modern world economy. But they have mastered the art of political survival. The economic dominance of the rulers, the absence of the countervailing power of property and the private sector, has increased the awesome power of the governments and their security establishments.

It is no mystery, this sorrowful decline of the Arabs. They have invested their hopes in states, and the states have failed. According to the UNDP's report, government revenues as percentage of GDP are 13% in Third World Countries, but they are 25% in the Middle East and North Africa. The oil states are a world apart in that regard: The comparable figures are 68% in Libya, 45% in Saudi Arabia, and 40% in Algeria, Kuwait and Qatar. Oil is no panacea for these lands. The unemployment rates for the Arab world as a whole are the highest in the world, and no prophecy

could foresee these societies providing the 51 million jobs the UNDP report says are needed by 2020 to "absorb young entrants to the labor force who would otherwise face an empty future."

The simple truth is that the Arab world has terrible rulers and worse oppositionists. There are autocrats on one side and theocrats on the other. A timid and fragile middle class is caught in the middle between regimes it abhors and Islamists it fears.

Indeed, the technocrats and intellectuals associated with these development reports are themselves no angels. On the whole, they are unreconstructed Arab nationalists. The patrons of these reports are the likes of the Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi and the Palestinian leader Hanan Ashrawi, intellectuals and public figures whose stock in-trade is presumed Western (read American) guilt for the ills that afflict the Arabs.

There is cruelty and plunder aplenty in the Arab world, but these writers are particularly exercised about Iraq. "This intervention polarized the country," they say of Iraq. This is a myth of the Arabs who are yet to grant the Iraqis the right to their own history: There had been a secular culture under the Baath, they insist, but the American war begot the sectarianism. To go by this report, Iraq is a place of mayhem and plunder, a land where militias rule uncontested.

* * *

For decades, it was the standard argument of the Arabs that America had cast its power in the region on the side of the autocrats. In Iraq in 2003, and then in Lebanon, an American president bet on the freedom of the Arabs. George W. Bush's freedom agenda broke with a long history and insisted that the Arabs did not have tyranny in their DNA. A despotism in Baghdad was toppled, a Syrian regime that had all but erased its border with Lebanon was pushed out of its smaller neighbor, bringing an end to three decades of brutal occupation. The "Cedar Revolution" that erupted in the streets of Beirut was but a child of Bush's diplomacy of freedom.

Arabs know this history even as they say otherwise, even as they tell the pollsters the obligatory things about America the pollsters expect them to say. True, Mr. Bush's wager on elections in the Palestinian territories rebounded to the benefit of Hamas. But the ballot is not infallible, and the verdict of that election was a statement

on the malignancies of Palestinian politics. It was no fault of American diplomacy that the Palestinians, who needed to break with a history of maximalist demands, gave in yet again to radical temptations.

Now the Arabs are face to face with their own history. Instead of George W. Bush, there is Barack Hussein Obama, an American leader pledged to a foreign policy of "realism." The Arabs express fondness for the new American president. In his fashion (and in the fashion of their world and their leaders, it has to be said) President Obama gave the Arabs a speech in Cairo two months ago. It was a moment of theater and therapy. The speech delivered, the foreign visitor was gone. He had put another marker on the globe, another place to which he had taken his astounding belief in his biography and his conviction that another foreign population had been wooed by his oratory and weaned away from anti-Americanism.

The crowd could tell itself that the new standard-bearer of the Pax Americana was a man who understood its concerns, but the embattled modernists and the critics of autocracy knew better. There is no mistaking the animating drive of the new American policy in that Greater Middle East: realism and benign neglect, the safety of the status quo rather than the risks of liberty. (If in doubt, the Arabs could check with their Iranian neighbors. The Persians would tell them of the new mood in Washington.)

One day an Arab chronicle could yet be written, and like all Arab chronicles, it would tell of woes and missed opportunities. It would acknowledge that brief interlude when American power gave Arab autocracies a scare, and when a despotism in Baghdad and a brutal "brotherly" occupation in Beirut were laid to waste. The chroniclers would have to be an honest lot. They would speak the language of daily life, and the truths that Arabs have seen and endured in recent years. On that day, the "human development reports" would be discarded, their writers seen for the purveyors of double speak and half-truths they were.

Mr. Ajami, a professor at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and an adjunct fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, is the author, among other books, of "The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967" (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 2009

A Taliban Takedown

If true, the news that a Predator drone killed Pakistan Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud last week is a notable victory in the war on terror, both for Pakistan and the

U.S. Previous reports of Mehsud's demise were greatly exaggerated, but this time Pakistani and U.S. officials are speaking with higher confidence that they've got him.

The fashionable view in anti-antiterror precincts is that terror leaders are like daisies—mow one down and another will pop up to take his place. But not all leaders are easily replaced, and the charismatic and daring Mehsud is probably one of them. He was by most accounts a key figure in uniting the dozen or so factions of the

Taliban under his umbrella group Tehreek-e-Taliban.

He is believed to have masterminded a string of bomb attacks that killed hundreds of Pakistanis, including the 2007

assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. His activities contributed significantly to the broader instability along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and put pressure on Pakistan's democratically elected President Asif Ali Zardari. There's a reason the U.S. had a \$5 million bounty on his head.

The attack also shows the continued utility of the U.S. drone campaign along the Afghan-Pakistan border. The CIA-controlled attacks are made with the (non-public) approval of Pakistan, but Pakistan

leaders have complained that the U.S. cared only about pursuing Taliban who posed a threat to Afghanistan or the U.S. homeland. Mehsud focused his attacks on Pakistan itself. So the strike should underscore the U.S. argument that the Taliban pose as much a threat to Pakistan as they do to U.S. interests, while reassuring Pakistan officials that the U.S. is willing to use its assets to reduce the Taliban threat to Pakistan.

The strike also underscores that Pakistan has been one of the Obama Administration's early foreign-policy successes. Only three months ago, the Taliban was marching on Islamabad and U.S. officials were fretting about the lack of Pakistani will to resist Islamist extremism. But the U.S. worked behind the scenes to encourage a counterattack, Pakistan's military has since retaken the Swat Valley in the north, and Mr. Zardari's government has

put aside some of its petty domestic squabbling to focus on the main enemy.

To his credit, President Obama has also stepped up the pace of drone attacks, which are now thought to have killed more than a third of the top Taliban leaders. These columns reported a month ago on an intelligence report showing that the strikes are also carried out with little or no harm to civilians. If Mehsud is dead, now is the time for Pakistan to press the advantage in its own campaign in its frontier provinces before a new leader can establish control.

For cosmetic political reasons, the Obama Administration no longer wants to use the phrase "global war on terror." Yet in Pakistan and Afghanistan it is fighting a more vigorous war on terrorists than did the previous Administration. Whatever you want to call it, the death of Baitullah Mehsud makes the world a safer place.

**Mehsud's
demise is a
victory for
Pakistan and
the U.S.**

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 2009

There Is a Military Option on Iran

By Chuck Wald

In a policy address at the Council on Foreign Relations last month, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said of Iran, "We cannot be afraid or unwilling to engage." But the Iranian government has yet to accept President Obama's outstretched hand. Even if Tehran suddenly acceded to talks, U.S. policy makers must prepare for the eventuality that diplomacy fails. While there has been much discussion of economic sanctions, we cannot neglect the military's role in a Plan B.

There has been a lack of serious public discussion of the military tools available to us. Any mention of them is either met with accusations of warmongering or hushed with concerns over sharing sensitive information. It is important to discuss, within legal limits, such a serious issue as openly as possible. Discussion strengthens our democracy and dispels misinformation.

The military can play an important role in solving this complex problem without firing a single shot. Publicly signaling serious preparation for a military strike might obviate the need for one if deployments force Tehran to recognize the costs of its nuclear defiance. Mr. Obama might consider, for example, the deployment of additional carrier battle groups and mine-sweepers to the waters off Iran, and the conduct of military exercises with allies.

If such pressure fails to impress Iranian leadership, the U.S. Navy could move to blockade Iranian ports. A blockade—which is an act of war—would effectively cut off Iran's gasoline imports, which constitute about one-third of its consumption. Especially in the aftermath of post-election protests, the Iranian leadership must worry about the economic dislocations and political impact of such action.

Should these measures not compel Tehran to reverse course on its nuclear program, and only after all other diplomatic avenues and economic pressures have been exhausted, the U.S. military is capable of launching a devastating attack on Iranian nuclear and military facilities.

Many policy makers and journalists dismiss the military option on the basis of a false sense of futility. They assume that the U.S. military is already overstretched, that we lack adequate intelligence about the location of covert nuclear sites, and that known sites are too heavily fortified.

Such assumptions are false.

An attack on Iranian nuclear facilities would mostly involve air assets, primarily Air Force and Navy, that are not strained by operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, the presence of U.S. forces in countries that border Iran offers distinct advantages. Special Forces and intelligence personnel already in the region can easily move to protect key assets or perform clandestine operations. It would be prudent to emplace additional missile-defense

capabilities in the region, upgrade both regional facilities and allied militaries, and expand strategic partnerships with countries such as Azerbaijan and Georgia to pressure Iran from all directions.

Conflict may reveal previously undetected Iranian facilities as Iranian forces move to protect them. Moreover, nuclear sites buried underground may survive sustained bombing, but their entrances and exits will not.

Of course, there are huge risks to military action: U.S. and allied casualties; rallying Iranians around an unstable and oppressive regime; Iranian reprisals be they direct or by proxy against us and our allies; and Iranian-instigated unrest in the Persian

Gulf states, first and foremost in Iraq.

Furthermore, while a successful bombing campaign would set back Iranian nuclear development, Iran would undoubtedly retain its nuclear knowhow. An attack would also necessitate years of continued vigilance, both to retain the ability to strike previously undiscovered sites and to ensure that Iran does not revive its nuclear program.

But the risks of military action must be weighed against those of doing nothing. If the Iranian regime continues to advance its nuclear program despite the best efforts of Mr. Obama and other world leaders, we risk Iranian domination of the oil-rich Persian Gulf, threats to U.S.-allied Arab regimes, the emboldening of radicals in the region, the creation of an existential threat to Israel, the destabilization of Iraq,

the shutdown of the Israel-Palestinian peace process, and a regional nuclear arms race.

A peaceful resolution of the threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions would certainly be the best possible outcome. But should diplomacy and economic pressure fail, a U.S. military strike against Iran is a technically feasible and credible option.

Gen. Wald (U.S. Army four-star, retired) was the air commander for the initial stages of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and deputy commander of the U.S. European Command. He was also a participant in the Bipartisan Policy Center's project on U.S. policy toward Iran, "Meeting the Challenge."

**U.S. forces
could do serious
damage to
Tehran's
nuclear
facilities.**

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 2009

Indonesian Antiterror Victories

It looks like Indonesian police just missed catching Southeast Asia's most wanted terror suspect over the weekend. But the operation to hunt down Noordin Mohamed Top and the related defusing of a bomb plot aimed at President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono still speak well of that country's counterterror efforts.

Indonesia's elite counterterrorism force, Detachment 88, has been hunting Noordin since the 2002 Bali bombings. The Malaysian-born terrorist is the head of a small splinter faction of al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiya and is thought to be the mastermind of a string of attacks culminating in last month's Jakarta hotel bombings. On Saturday, Indonesian authorities raided a farmhouse several hundred miles from Jakarta and another house near the capital, arresting five and killing three. Despite early reports Noordin was among the dead, he's prob-

ably still alive. But Jakarta is getting closer to nabbing him.

This weekend's raids will go down as another victory in the larger war on terror even though Noordin is on the loose. Detachment 88 has rounded up hundreds of Jemaah Islamiya members since 2002, including Jemaah Islamiya leader Abu Dujana in 2007, to the point where the group may no longer function as an effective terrorist operation. (Noordin's splinter faction is the exception, and even then has only about 30 members.) Success breeds success: Suspects arrested in the wake of the July 17 hotel attack in Jakarta tipped off authorities to the location of Noordin's safe house.

Just as importantly, police thwarted an apparent assassination plot against President Yudhoyono Saturday when they recovered hundreds of kilograms of explosive materials from another house

near Jakarta. Terrorists allegedly intended to set off an explosion near one of the president's houses or his motorcade. It's unclear whether they would have been able to pull off such an act, but last month's hotel bombings showcased how sophisticated Indonesia's terrorists can be.

One important factor that has helped Indonesia's fight against terrorism is that the government has thrown itself wholeheartedly into the effort. Mr. Yudhoyono extended his "highest gratitude and respect" to the police for their "brilliant achievement" on Saturday. Detachment 88 is among the best-funded police units in the country. Jakarta has also embraced the help of Australia and the U.S., which have helped train Indonesia's antiterror forces.

Now Indonesia's political class needs to step up its fight on the ideas front. Up to now, Jakarta has been tolerant of rad-

ical teaching and preaching despite its successes arresting terrorists. Witness the release in 2006 of Abu Bakir Bashir, convicted of conspiracy in the Bali bombing and well known for his radical teachings, or last year's antipornography law passed as a sop to Islamic parties. That may be starting to change after religious parties lost ground in this year's elections. There are signs Mr. Yudhoyono's next cabinet appointments may take Islamic-party politicians out of key posts.

Mr. Yudhoyono won election in 2004 in part of a platform of security, and he won re-election earlier this year with an even larger mandate to defend Indonesia's tradition of moderate Islam. This weekend's events show how far Indonesia has come in the fight against terror, and how much more remains to be done. Mr. Yudhoyono would do well to stay the course.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 2009

Afghanistan Needs New Leadership

By Ashraf Ghani

Afghanistan's upcoming presidential election represents a critical test for our young democracy. It is a referendum on the lawlessness of the current regime and the future stability of our country.

Over the past five years President Hamid Karzai has turned Afghanistan into one of the world's most failed and corrupt states. Instead of leading our country toward democracy, he has formed alliances with criminals. He has appointed governors and police chiefs who openly flout the rule of law. And he has turned a blind eye to a multibillion-dollar drug trade that has crippled growth and enabled the insurgency to flourish.

To reverse the insurgency's gains and begin to rebuild the country, we must elect a more capable and accountable government—one that creates jobs, builds houses, and delivers on basic services like education, electricity and water. This is why I'm running for president. I believe that clear vision, dedicated leadership, careful management, and the creation of an environment of trust are the best ways to restore peace and security to Afghanistan. Mr. Karzai's government is fiercely divided along ethnic and tribal lines. We need a system based on merit, in which every Afghan could see himself as part of the government.

My vision of an inclusive, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is based on my experience as finance minister from 2002-04 when I worked with other Afghans to achieve real reform. In just two years we completely modernized communications. Partnering with the minister of communications, I refused to offer sweetheart deals

to private companies. Instead, we insisted that private telecoms gain access to the Afghan market by paying real taxes through a transparent process. The number of mobile phones in the country jumped to over a million at the end of 2005 from just 100 in July 2002. There are now 7.5 million phones, and private investment exceeds \$1 billion. Private telecom is now the second-highest generator of revenue for the government.

We can follow the model of telecom reform to boost public revenue and create as many as one million new jobs in agriculture, construction, services, mining, communication and transportation industries. We can create model economic zones by targeting provinces with the best potential for growth and increasing budget authority on the local level. And we can use the wealth we generate to build one million new housing units for families. Both my employment and housing plans will focus specifically on creating economic opportunities for our youth, our poor and women. Currently marginalized, these three groups can bring economic growth to their communities.

Women's rights have been grossly violated in Afghanistan during the past decades. In addition to promoting women-run industries like animal husbandry and food processing, I will fight for women's property rights, increase female participation in government, and improve women's access to essential reproductive health care by collaborating with successful midwife programs. Investing in women's education is a fundamental building block for

any developing society and needs to be a top priority. I intend to create a women's-only university to meet the unique needs of female students for leadership and management skills.

My experience as chancellor of Kabul University from 2005-06 convinced me of the urgency of educational reform. The most talented among our youth are taught on the basis of obsolete curricula that

were current thinking at the time of their grandparents. We need to update our national curriculum to reflect contemporary science, engineering, economics, arts and law. And we must aggressively recruit from poor and rural provinces.

More than half of Afghanistan's 33 million people live in small towns and rural communities. Developing these areas presents a formidable challenge but holds enormous potential. In 2002 I designed the comprehensive Afghan National Development Framework. This included the National Solidarity Program, which allocates block grants to local communities. Today this program has reached more than 23,000 villages in 359 of Afghanistan's 465 districts, enabling individuals to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects. It promotes good governance, empowers rural Afghans, and supports even the poorest in the community. Today the success of this model has been recognized globally, and it is being adopted by other developing countries around the world.

It is time to get Afghanistan back on the path to peace and development that we were on from 2002-05. The current cri-

That's why
I'm running
for president.

sis was not inevitable. Mr. Karzai abandoned his responsibility to the Afghan people.

Afghanistan's painful quest for a national consensus has led to the realization that we must both build upon and overcome our past. As inheritors of the classic civilization of Islam, we must embrace the values of tolerance, accountability, transparency, justice, the rule of law, scientific inquiry, and active engagement with other civilizations. Simultaneously, we must overcome the divisions and factions that have brought death and destruction. We appreciate the assistance of our international partners but never forget that we are responsible for our future. This election is our chance to chart that future.

Mr. Ghani is a presidential candidate in Afghanistan.

Why U.S. Diplomacy Will Fail with Iran

By Edward N. Luttwak

Long before his inauguration, Barack Obama lucidly explained how he would deal with Iran. During the campaign he said he would "engage" its leaders by offering talks without preconditions—without even asking them to stop chanting "death to America" when concluding their speeches.

His premise was that President George W. Bush's policy had been incoherent and unsuccessful in stopping Tehran's drive to acquire nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Both charges are true. It was certainly illogical of Mr. Bush to denounce the Iranian regime as part of the "axis of evil" and then to seek its support in Afghanistan when forming the first, provisional Karzai government, and then again in Iraq to calm down the truculent preacher Moqtada al-Sadr and his violent Mahdi militia.

But Mr. Obama's critique failed to acknowledge that Mr. Bush's incoherence paid off. Iran helped consolidate the post-invasion governments created by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq, even while supplying weapons to whoever would attack Americans. (For example, it lobbied for U.S. candidate Hamid Karzai to become chairman of the governing committee when Afghan leaders gathered in Germany in Dec. 2001.)

Still, the Bush administration's failure to stop Iran's nuclear and missile programs stands out. Nothing worked—not the occasional muted threats of bombing the nuclear installations, nor the diplomacy delegated to the British, French and Germans. The "E-3" talks started very well with the Tehran Agreed State-

ment of Oct. 21, 2003—under which Iran temporarily promised to stop enriching uranium. They ended in ridicule in 2006 when chief negotiator Hassan Rowhani boasted that they'd kept the Europeans talking while building up their nuclear plants.

In retrospect, it is obvious why the E-3 negotiators seemed so successful in 2003. Iran's leaders had just witnessed the U.S.

invasion of Iraq and the swift, almost effortless destruction of Saddam Hussein's regime. Fearing they might be next, they stopped the nuclear weapons program they have always denied and the nuclear enrichment program they finally acknowledged in 2002—after its disclosure by dissidents.

Later, when Iran's leaders saw the U.S. bogged down in Iraq and no longer feared a march on Tehran, they publicly resumed uranium enrichment, and also, no doubt, the secret weapons program as well. So Mr. Bush had failed, just as Mr. Obama said.

There was only one more step before "engagement" could begin: Mr. Obama's June 4 Cairo speech in which he apologized for the August 1953 overthrow of Iran's Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddeq. "In the middle of the Cold War," he said, "the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government." The CIA was certainly involved, but the cringing was quite unnecessary. By August 1953 Mosaddeq had dismissed Iran's parliament and was ruling undemocratically by personal decree. When angry mobs converged on his residence, he fled to a U.S. aid office next door trusting that the Americans would save his life. They did.

As it happened, Mr. Obama's apology

and his offer of unconditional talks backfired.

With Iran's presidential selection of June 12 coming up, the all-powerful Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had his opportunity to replace the thoroughly unrepresentable, loudly extremist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with a more plausible negotiating partner for Mr. Obama. This strategy had been used before. In 1997, when the regime needed to calm unrest at home and

mollify opinion abroad, it gave the presidency to the soft-spoken, elegantly robed, and supposedly liberalizing Mohammad Khatami. He was just the man to provide a moderate front for the clerical dictatorship. To be sure, by the time Mr. Khatami ended his presidency in 2005, everyone knew that he had not even tried to liberalize anything of substance. But by then he had served his purpose.

Evidently, Mr. Khamenei rejected the option of choosing a moderate. Instead he awarded Ahmadinejad a "divine" win with wildly improbable majorities—even in the home towns of his rivals.

Mr. Obama's problem is that Mr. Khamenei could only have chosen Ahmadinejad because he does not want

friendly talks with the U.S. He evidently calculates that without the ideology of "anti Americanism" the regime would collapse. He is right.

Certainly religious support cannot be enough anymore. Too many high-ranking clerics, including Grand Ayatollahs Hossein Ali Montazeri and Yusef Saanei, now publicly oppose the regime. Nor can Persian nationalism serve as the prop: Its chief target is the despised Arabs, which is

problematic, as the regime keeps trying to be more Arab than the Arabs in its hostility to Israel. Yet this hostility is itself a problem internally because the regime's generous funding of Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad is extremely unpopular in Iran. Only anti-Americanism is left, and Mr. Khamenei will not let Mr. Obama take it away.

Unless Iran's politics change, Mr. Obama's policy will fail. At that point, he will need a new, new policy

of increasingly severe sanctions under the looming threat of bombardment—exactly Mr. Bush's old policy. But as Iran's nuclear program advances, time is running out for this policy to work.

Mr. Luttwak, a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, is the author of the forthcoming "The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire" (Harvard).



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei under the watchful gaze of Ayatollah Khomeini.

The cost of Arab peace concessions

Reluctance to endorse peace dividend without real peace

Once Barack Obama made up his mind to push for a resolution of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, it became inevitable there would be an epic test of wills between the US president and Israel's prime minister, the irredentist Benjamin Netanyahu.

So it has proved, with Mr Netanyahu responding provocatively to US demands for a total freeze on Israel's colonisation of occupied Palestinian land by expanding the number of settlers – on Sunday, for instance, evicting Palestinian families in Arab east Jerusalem to make way for Jewish families.

But, as everyone watches to see who blinks first, the Obama administration is seeing its strategy attacked from another flank.

Despite intense US diplomacy, Saudi Arabia, Washington's closest Arab ally, has brushed aside efforts to extract Arab concessions – such as the opening of Israeli trade delegations in Arab countries – in exchange for a settlements freeze. On the face of it, it would seem reasonable for Arabs to gradually “normalise” relations with Israel, to help pave the way towards peace with the Palestinians. But their experience of the peace process has ensured that is not how most Arabs see it.

Prince Saud al-Faisal, the veteran Saudi foreign minister, is ech-

ing widespread sentiments when he called for a “comprehensive approach” to peace that “defines the final outcome at the outset and launches into negotiations over final status issues: borders, Jerusalem, water, refugees and security”.

This is not just because Saudi Arabia is behind a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace plan, spurned by Israel since it was endorsed by the Arab League in 2002. It is not just because gradualist processes such as Oslo failed because there was no agreement on the final destination, enabling the extremists on each side to exercise a veto. Nor is it just because many Arab leaders cynically use the situation of “no war, no peace” as an alibi to monopolise power and resources.

In 1992-96, at the height of the peace process, Israel reaped a peace dividend without concluding a peace. Diplomatic recognition of Israel doubled, from 85 to 161 countries, exports doubled and foreign investment increased sixfold. Per capita income in the occupied territories fell in the same period by more than a third, while the number of settlers expanded by half. A broad-looking avenue led quickly to a road-block. The Arabs have not forgotten, and Mr Obama will have to get more than a settlement freeze out of Israel to lure them down that road again.

When Bill went to Pyongyang

US should now be extra alert to North Korean blackmail

It was not long ago that the world had written him off as an ageing leader with little or no remaining grip on power. But Bill Clinton is back. So it seems is the other dear leader, Kim Jong-il. For a man who had just a few weeks ago been declared terminally ill – one Japanese academic had even claimed he was dead – North Korea's dictator is looking quite sprightly.

The extraordinary photographs showing him flanked by a former US president (doing his best to imitate a sphinx) and several former US officials are a propaganda coup. They will without any doubt be used to shore up his position at home and secure his ability to confer succession upon his third son, Kim Jong-woon, still in his 20s.

Unlike in the dying days of the Clinton administration, when the former president was desperate to strike a last-minute deal with Pyongyang, Mr Kim's regime is now the proud owner of a nuclear bomb.

It is clear what Mr Kim has gained. But what, if anything, has the US achieved apart, of course, from the release of two American journalists facing 12 years of hard labour? Barack Obama has sought to portray Mr Clinton's visit as purely private. That is not credible, particularly given the former president's relationship to Hillary

Clinton, secretary of state. In more than three hours of discussions with Mr Kim, Mr Clinton must have strayed beyond idle chit-chat. It can only be hoped he sought to discover what is North Korea's negotiating bottom line and what, if anything, could persuade it to part company with its nuclear weapons.

Unfortunately, the answer to that question is probably nothing. While the Bush administration was searching Iraq for imaginary weapons of mass destruction, Pyongyang was busy building real ones. The most that may now be achievable is to get it to freeze its programme and to sign verifiable agreements not to hawk its technology to others.

On balance, the US is right to have made this imaginative and unconventional approach. But neither Washington nor anyone else should be blind to the dangers of North Korean blackmail. Mr Kim has used the arrest of two journalists to secure the bilateral meeting he craved, albeit with the head of a former administration. Next, he will be after money and supplies. Washington must decide what it can realistically demand of Pyongyang in terms of nuclear commitments. Then it should stick to that position and not budge one iota until North Korea complies.

Philippine democracy still awaits its redeemer



David Pilling

At midnight on Tuesday, as monsoon rains lashed the shoddy pavements, tens of thousands of ordinary Filipinos waited patiently outside Manila Cathedral to file past the coffin of Corazon Aquino, the queen of people power. Standing just a few metres from the open casket, Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, a senator and Aquino's only son, told me: "My mother actualised that which we consider the ideal. She took over from dictatorship, and one of her first acts was to call for a constitution that would curtail her own powers."

So overwhelming has been the emotional outpouring that even Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the current, unloved, president, whose resignation Aquino had demanded, felt obliged to cut short a visit to Washington and fly home to pay her respects. That must have been hard to swallow since so many of the

tributes to Aquino have pointedly contrasted her honesty with that of Mrs Arroyo, whose administration the public suspects of widespread corruption and a desire to cling to office beyond its constitutional due date next year.

Far from seeking to prolong her tenure - thrust upon her in 1986 after her husband's assassination by associates of Ferdinand Marcos, the dictator - Aquino could hardly wait to slip back into private life after serving just one term. Cory mania, symbolised by the yellow ribbons that once again adorned Manila yesterday, inspired popular participation in politics around the world. But if the rebellion she embodied has been revered, the Philippine democracy that she helped restore has not been so appreciated.

That is especially unfortunate in east Asia, a region with too few compelling examples of successful democracies, notwithstanding subsequent transitions from authoritarian regimes in South Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia. If anything, those who seek to equate Asia's strong growth record with authoritarian governments - conveniently forgetting the economic wreckage stemming from dictatorships in Burma, Cambodia

and pre-Deng Xiaoping China - routinely offer the Philippines as an example of the alleged economic costs inherent to democracy.

That is too bad. It is undeniable that the Philippines has disappointed, whether under the iron boot of Marcos or the peso-filled gloves of successive democratic governments. After the war, the Philippines, with its English-speaking population and close links with its

For all her noble qualities, Aquino failed to transcend her class by dismantling its skewed colonial inheritance

former US colonial master, was considered Asia's most promising economic prospect, second only to Japan. It has not panned out thus.

Half a century later, the Philippines comes well down the league table of Asian nations, with a nominal per capita income of around \$2,000, a fraction of countries such as South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. It continues to churn out able workers. But an extraordinary 9m

have been forced to find work outside the country. The roughly 10 per cent of gross domestic product they send back too often conceals the tragedy of broken families.

For all her noble qualities, Aquino missed an opportunity to put her country on a better path. The daughter of an aristocratic family with interests in the sugar industry, she failed to transcend her class by dismantling the skewed colonial inheritance of the hacienda-owning elite. She turned out to be anything but a social revolutionary.

Sheila Coronel of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism says Aquino saw politics as more about changing the person within than strengthening institutions. "Aquino talks about politics in moral and religious terms," she wrote in 2006. "Her political vocabulary is firmly Catholic: she speaks of suffering, sacrifice, good and evil, right and wrong."

Aquino's enduring legacy, the 1986 constitution, was essentially an "anti-Marcos" document designed to prevent the re-emergence of a strongman. But it had its limits. Her successor Fidel Ramos, a former military man, had implemented martial law under Marcos. Joseph Estrada, who came next, was a

matinee idol whose script was cut short by a second exercise of people power that installed Mrs Arroyo.

Instead of being an agent of the social and economic change the Philippines badly needs, its democracy has become a textbook example of patronage politics. The constitution enshrined several nationalistic clauses, including ones limiting or banning foreign ownership, that were ostensibly designed to protect the country from exploitation but have ended up retarding growth and giving politicians a freer hand to distribute favours. The Philippines is left with all the trappings of democracy - an argumentative press, free elections and regular transfers of power. Yet it has broken less decisively with the past than many other Asian countries. That has left it, rather like many Latin American countries that lurch from one caudillo to another, too reliant on what Raul

Pangalangan, a law professor, calls "raw politics". Today, in the eyes of a nation in mourning, the only thing that could truly redeem Philippine democracy would be another Cory Aquino. Yet, if truth be told, even she was not able to do that.

david.pilling@ft.com

Iran's divided regime prevails – at the cost of its legitimacy



David Gardner

The body language will have been instantly comprehensible to any and every Iranian who watched it. At his religious confirmation as Iran's president on Monday, Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad made as if to embrace Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The supreme leader brushed him aside and the president ended up planting a kiss on his shoulder. It was as if this mercurial and messianic president, eight weeks after the regime convulsed Iran by imposing his re-election on a rebellious people, had been brought to heel.

But appearances can deceive, especially in the opaque world of Iran's convoluted politics. A never very reliable compass is still spinning. It is not just the broad establishment of the Islamic Republic that has split, with reformists and pragmatic conservatives pitted against fundamentalists and the security apparatus. The cohesion of the theocracy has cracked to the point where its core constituents are at odds with each other as well.

On the face of it, a triumphalist Islamist regime has crushed the opposition and reaffirmed the order established by the revolution that overthrew the Shah in 1979. In reality, the Islamic Republic has entered new, barely charted territory. Mr Khamenei, at the apex of the system, has, after all, gambled the legitimacy of the regime by betting it on Mr Ahmadi-Nejad. In so doing, the supreme leader has exchanged the mystique of the office at the heart of Iran's unique power structure for the role of faction chief.

The standard audit of the balance of power in Tehran is based on the premise that the power wielded by Mr Khamenei – successor to the revered imam, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini – is unassailable. He controls the army, the Revolutionary Guards, the intelligence services, the judiciary and foreign policy.

Moreover, a vast network of parastatal fiefs is accountable only to him. A private sector dominated by the Bazaar, a conservative trading community happy to exploit the loopholes in a rigged economy, is held to be in his pocket. The leader further controls both the conventional and traditional mass media: broadcasting and the mosque.

Recent experience shows the theocratic institutions of the Islamic Republic have overwhelmed its proto-democratic redoubts. Thus, under the reformist government of Mohammad Khatami, which tried in 1997-2005 to extend civic freedoms and the rule of law, the Guardian Council and the judiciary struck down more than 100 laws passed by the *Majlis*, the elected parliament. Under Mr Ahmadi-Nejad, appointed theocrats and Revolutionary Guards have had even freer rein.

But if there were no more to it than that, then a regime that says it won 63 per cent of the popular vote would not need to brutalise its people and stage show-trials against its (still, amazingly) loyal opposition.

Even allowing for the confusing mix of breast-beating and whingeing about conspiracies that punctuates official discourse, the regime's aggression has reached a new pitch. "Let the swearing-in ceremony occur," one opposition paper quoted the president railing against his opponents, and "then we will take them by the collar and slam their heads into the ceiling".

The televised "confessions" of Sayyed Mohammad Ali Abtahi, vice-president under Mr Khatami,

and Mohammad Atrianfar, a newspaper editor close to former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, purporting to establish that Iran has just aborted a western-backed "velvet revolution", are chilling evidence of how far the theocrats are willing to go.

Their conspiracy thesis is nonsense. Former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani – the arch-fixer and chameleon of Iranian politics – and Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the former prime minister robbed at the polls after an extraordinary surge of support, are the offspring of the revolution. They seek the reform of the Islamic Republic, not to overthrow it. As Mehdi Karubi, former *Majlis* speaker and presidential candidate, told the Spanish daily *El Pais* this week:

The democratic veil of the republic has been torn away and nothing stands between the regime and the people

"Our dispute is about the elections; we are not questioning the system."

But that distinction is no longer sustainable. Mr Khamenei's reckless gamble, and the protean movement of pent-up anger and protest it has provoked, have changed everything. The tattered democratic veil of the republic has been torn away and nothing stands between the regime and a young and impatient people, hungry for change, desperate for jobs and despairing of reform.

The extent of post-election brutality and the loss of legitimacy has now reached very far. Beyond the usual suspects and schismatics, the regime is losing the Bazaar – and the top Shia clerics. Influential ayatollahs, always disdainful of Mr

Khamenei's lack of theological credentials and mostly unconvinced by Khomeinist clerical rule, are fed up of seeing their religion dragged through the dirt of factional feuding. While people in Iran and around the world reacted in horror to the tragedy of Neda Agha-Soltan, captured on video as she was shot dead by a *Basij* militiaman, the beating to death in prison of Mohsen Rouhollahi, son of a leading fundamentalist, has spread revulsion at the lawless turn of events right into the ranks of the theocrats.

It was not only the usual suspects who boycotted Mr Ahmadi-Nejad's inauguration and, when the president took a week to obey the supreme leader's order to fire his vice-president, even some of his hardline supporters threatened publicly to pull the plug on him.

Yet there he is, this pantomime villain out of central casting, with his PhD in traffic management and ostentatious austerity, dangerously dividing the nation. How come?

There is an element of class confrontation. He has made a career out of being underestimated. The opponents of reform could also claim: Mr Khatami led Iran up a blind alley into the Bush "axis of evil". But there must be more.

Mr Ahmadi-Nejad may be the vehicle through which a new elite, led by the Revolutionary Guards, is consolidating power at the expense of the mullahs. With their tightening grip over the economy, these are the new vested interests of the revolution. Mr Khamenei may have had no option but to back them. Another reasonable working hypothesis is that the theocrats and the new elite fear the embrace of Barack Obama – and trust only themselves to negotiate with him.

The writer's book, Last Chance: the Middle East in the Balance, is published by I.B. Tauris

Rasmussen's tricky mission for Nato

Nato needs to be less of a club and more of an alliance

The world hardly noticed when its most powerful collective security organisation got a new secretary-general this week. It should. Nato may not seem as immediately relevant as when Soviet tanks were poised to race for the Rhine. But the job facing Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a former Danish prime minister, is crucial – and daunting.

Nato increasingly risks being seen as an optional alliance where countries pick and choose their obligations. The vast majority of troops in Afghanistan, where Mr Rasmussen is today, are from a handful of members. Such asymmetry is not atypical. It rankles.

The alliance is not yet broken. Enlargement must be counted a success. New members view Nato as the final guarantee of sovereignty. The queue to join stretches from the Balkans to the Black Sea.

But Nato needs reform. Financing of operations must be streamlined. More money should be spent from common funds rather than stumped up by alliance members for specific tasks. Command structures could be simplified. National contributions are often so hedged with conditions that Nato's ability to function as an alliance on the ground is diminished. It is to be hoped that Danish grit will overcome the bureaucracy which has stymied reform efforts in the past.

The long-term agenda ranges from finishing the job in Kosovo to managing Russia. Mr Rasmussen will need firmness and tact to improve relations with Moscow while keeping the door open to Georgia and Ukraine, as he must.

Glitches between EU and Nato remain. Their resolution should be easier now France has rejoined Nato's command structure. Practical co-operation on both soft and hard security, rather than theological discussions of roles, is key.

But Afghanistan is the immediate focus, unwisely cast as make-or-break for Nato credibility. This week, Mr Rasmussen warned the Taliban not to confuse the aim of handing lead security responsibility to the Afghans with a western retreat. Nato forces will remain in-country for "as long as it takes".

Which Nato forces? Afghanistan already looks less like a Nato operation, and more like an Anglo-American one (albeit with genuine sacrifice from Nato allies). The McChrystal review of operations, expected in the next two weeks, is likely to recommend more troops and a focus on counter-insurgency unpopular with some Europeans.

If Europe wants America to listen to it, and Nato to be an alliance rather than a label, it will need to pull its weight, spending (and risking) much more.

Indonesia police hold terror suspects

Ringleader Noordin believed captured

By Katherine Demopoulos
in Jakarta

Indonesian police have arrested up to five people in a terrorist hunt in central Java and believe they may have found Noordin Mohammed Top, the prime suspect in the bombings last month of two luxury hotels in Jakarta.

A police spokesman confirmed only two arrests following a shoot-out in Temanggung in central Java, and said the identity of the men could not yet be confirmed.

He added that a siege was under way at the site of the shootings and three further suspects remained inside a besieged building.

According to media reports that claim five people have been detained, two of those arrested are related to the owner of the house and one of the other three may be Mr Noordin. At least 150 police are reported to be at the scene.

Mr Noordin, a Malaysian citizen, is the prime suspect in the July 17 attacks on the Jakarta Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels, which killed nine people including the two suicide bombers.

He heads up a group that broke away from the al-Qaeda affiliate Jemaah Islamiyah, and is blamed for the 2003 attack on the same Marriott hotel and for the 2004 Australian embassy bombing.

The two bombers involved in the July attacks have still not been identified, although police have

used DNA to rule out Nur Hasbi, an associate of Mr Noordin, and a florist employed as a contractor at the Ritz-Carlton, and who has been missing since the attacks.

Last week Indonesian police said they were investigating a statement posted on a website purporting to come from a group calling itself al-Qaeda Indonesia. The group claimed responsibility for the bombs.

The statement ended with the supposed signature of Mr Noordin, who is thought to have escaped the police by making use of a nexus of family and JI ties in central Java, including a third marriage in the town of Cilacap.

An arrest in June in Cilacap netted bomb-making equipment at the house of a man believed by police

to be Mr Noordin's latest father-in-law.

The International Crisis Group, a think-tank, issued a report in the aftermath of the attacks saying that Mr Noordin "seems to have been living in the Cilacap area at least since 2006 and perhaps even earlier, finding shelter and protection from JI-linked families".

According to ICG, Mr Noordin stayed away from the sites of the bombings, but "helped select and indoctrinate the selected suicide bombers prior to their deployment".

The bombers in the July attacks killed three Australians and one New Zealander attending a networking breakfast at the Marriott hotel, a Marriott employee and two Dutch citizens at the Ritz-Carlton.

The agony of Fatah

Palestinians need credible new leadership and goals

The historic movement of Palestinian national aspiration for freedom and statehood, the Fatah party of the late Yassir Arafat, has managed to convene its first congress inside the occupied territories, after 20 years without meeting at all. What a spectacle it offers.

Fatah today resembles nothing so much as a bloated gerontocracy, a loose aggregate of colliding, ego-driven agendas. More interested in the trappings of statehood-without-a-state than the difficult practice of statecraft, its leaders, mostly over 70 and in their gleaming cars and suits, bear no relation to a young population struggling in poverty and walled into the shrinking residue of Palestine.

What should have been a historic congress – to rescue Fatah from its further slide into corruption and irrelevance after being trashed by the Islamist (but honest) Hamas in the 2006 general elections – was largely taken up with arguments about how to elect a new leadership, amid widespread accusations of vote-buying.

Fatah, which kept Palestinian hopes alive and put Palestine on the world's agenda, is heading for the dustbin of history unless it quickly re-articulates a national platform and comes up with a credible leadership – respected by Israelis as well as Palestinians.

Mahmoud Abbas, the elected Palestinian president, is not that person. He has nothing to show for his conciliatory approach except an expansion of the Israeli occupation. By far the most credible Fatah leader, Marwan Barghouti, is in an Israeli prison.

After years of being sidelined by the gerontocrats, Mr Barghouti is expected to be elected to the leadership. Although as a former militia leader, he has a complex and difficult history for the Israelis, they have discreetly let him conduct diplomacy from his jail cell, including on the so-called Prisoners' Document of 2007 which amounts to a Palestinian united front in favour of a two-states solution based on the 1967 borders. It is with such leaders – capable of delivering not just the rank-and-file of Fatah but Hamas – that Israel will have to deal if it ever wants a negotiated solution.

Palestinian leaders should also reflect on where violence has taken their people: into the prison of Gaza and the Bantustans of the West Bank. With Barack Obama, a peacemaker, in Washington, it is not force they need to deploy but the moral power of their argument and their undeniable rights. Civic resistance and diplomatic war are the arms that might – just might – deliver these rights.

How to make Afghan votes count

Zalmay Khalilzad

Afghanistan is in the grip of the second presidential campaign in its history. By their nature, elections are polarising events. However, in the case of Afghanistan, with its limited experience in electoral politics and ongoing insurgency, there is a real risk that the campaign could further destabilise the country.

I know, and have seen and felt, the tragedy of Afghanistan. Its origins lie in the cycle of no-holds-barred political competition among internal rivals and the decisions of foreign powers to manipulate Afghan factions for their own purposes. These actions, by Afghans and outsiders, have cost the country of my birth millions of lives and consigned it to isolation and poverty at a time of rising worldwide prosperity. The destructive cycle was interrupted by the overthrow of the Taliban regime and United Nations-sponsored Bonn process. The test today is to build on that success.

I know the leading candidates, all of whom have committed to respecting the democratic process. Yet the danger exists that some of them, or their supporters, will overstep the bounds of responsible competition. I also know that outsiders are easily tempted to pursue their own preferences rather than allow candidates to find their own level through a test of political support at the ballot box.

In this respect, I see several dangers in the current elections. The first is

ethnic polarisation. As election day draws closer, the process is acquiring ugly ethnic undertones. Despite progress among young Afghans, ethnicity remains the most dangerous faultline in Afghan politics. Ethnic appeals could have serious negative consequences for the stability of the country and the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission there.

Already there are disturbing signs in northern Afghanistan, an area dominated by Tajiks and Uzbeks but with pockets of Pashtuns, the country's largest ethnic group. Recent reports indicate that some local Pashtuns have felt intimidated and are turning to the Taliban, providing it with a wedge to infiltrate a region that has been relatively stable until recently.

Second, the Taliban and others who oppose progress in Afghanistan might seek to escalate the violence in order to prevent elections from taking place as planned. This could occur, for example, if one of the candidates were killed, which would lead to a mandatory postponement of the election under the Afghan constitution. Unsuccessful assassination attempts have already occurred against presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

If a candidate were to be killed, it is likely that those remaining would blame one another and the current government, which is responsible for the security of candidates and, arguably, would gain by staying in power if elections were delayed. A postponement would also prompt questions about whether the government could

legitimately run the country after its mandate expires on August 30.

Third, there is the danger that one or more of the contenders might not accept the declared results, leading to protracted violence, probably focused on Kabul. It is unclear whether Afghan security forces could control the situation on their own or would require assistance from the ISAF. This could be a no-win situation, with serious consequences for the ISAF role in Afghanistan whether it participated in the pacification effort or not.

Fourth, the international commu-

to ensure a level playing field. We must avoid actions that create the appearance that outsiders are seeking to decide the outcome of the election.

The second - and most important - step is for the US, UK and UN missions in Kabul to work out agreements among the key Afghan candidates to respect certain 'red lines'. They should agree not to mobilise support on an ethnic basis and to accept the election outcome if rules on transparency are respected.

The main candidates should also issue a joint declaration to facilitate post-election unity. They should articulate areas of agreement such as the formation of a competent national unity government by the winner of the presidential elections, support for the ISAF deployment, and the imperative to improve governance and delivery of services. Last, the ISAF needs to help develop, jointly with the Afghans, an emergency plan to prevent and contain violence should the results be disputed.

Five years ago, I had the privilege of representing the US in Afghanistan as we helped Afghanistan hold successful elections. The country still needs our help. President Barack Obama has correctly recognised that success in Afghanistan is an important American priority. It is vital that the US work actively to enable Afghan voices to be heard and to facilitate reconciliation, unity and stability after the people make their choice.

The writer was US ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq and the UN and is now a counsellor at CSIS

The US, UK and UN missions in Kabul need to work out agreements among key candidates to respect certain 'red lines'

nity is also taking unhelpful actions. While the ISAF and the UN are playing crucial roles in providing security and meeting the logistical needs of the elections, some officials are taking inappropriate partisan positions. Some favour Mr Karzai and are encouraging Afghans to support him. Others are working to unite his opponents or, at a minimum, to push the elections to a second round.

If unchecked, these dangers could produce an election that deepens the divisions in Afghan society and undermines stability. To minimise these risks, the US should take the lead with other friends of Afghanistan

How Afghans can build a better future

Ashraf Ghani

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, yet it is rich in resources and potential. The upcoming elections are an opportunity for Afghans to elect a government that is committed to economic growth for all, and to replacing the current predatory regime where wealth accrues to a few corrupt cronies.

From energy and agriculture to mining and construction, the country possesses the resources for robust and sustained development for decades to come. With a regional co-operation framework, Afghanistan can become a strategic land-bridge for goods, services and oil pipelines between south Asia, central Asia, the Middle East and China.

In a semi-arid region, water is everything. Afghanistan produces 80bn cubic metres of water each year, but only taps 20bn for irrigation, drinking and hydropower. The Amu River, shared with central Asian neighbours, alone has the potential to produce 10,000 megawatts of electricity a year.

As power is the critical driver of development, a regional partnership on energy initiatives could serve as the foundation stone for wider regional economic co-operation. Afghanistan sees potential electricity market partners through an electricity grid joining China, central Asia, Pakistan, Iran and eventually India.

Unfortunately, the corruption of the current regime has allowed drug trafficking to flourish across borders instead. In turn, the booming opium and heroin trade has funded the expansion of the insurgency and crippled the economy. The threat of drugs will only be eliminated when Afghan agriculture develops. Rural farmers will turn away from poppies if their incomes from staple crops rise from

the current level of \$1 a day to \$4. That is an achievable goal for the near future, involving investment in irrigation, technology and education. In the short-term, Nato forces present a large potential purchaser and an opportunity to turn Nato into a friend of the Afghan farmer. In addition, European Union trade preferences for Afghan agriculture could provide an enormous boost for our farmers.

Afghanistan is also rich in mineral resources. US Geological Survey reports have confirmed extensive deposits of copper, gold, gas, iron and barite, as well as gemstones such as emeralds, lapis lazuli and rubies. A mining-based economy is therefore a real medium-term alternative to the current drug-based economy.

Both sectors will depend on a reliable transport network to ensure on-time and safe deliveries. Investing in roads and railways to link the major mines in southern and central areas of the country to potential markets in the region and to China is essential.

Creating a competitive national construction industry is a prerequisite for effective utilisation of domestic resources. Fortunately it is the sector able to create the greatest number of jobs immediately. Critically, it will also make foreign assistance four to nine times more effective. With a coherent infrastructure development plan, including my goal of creating 1m new homes, the Afghan construction industry can become a powerhouse for creating jobs and wealth.

Afghan entrepreneurs are not short of money, but withering security and growing corruption are forcing them to take their capital abroad. In the Gulf alone there is an estimated \$16bn of Afghan money waiting to find outlets. The ministry of finance estimated, in March, that 70 per cent of potential domestic revenue is lost owing to corruption and mismanagement.

My vision of an inclusive, stable and prosperous Afghanistan is based on my experience as finance minister from 2002-04 when I worked to achieve lasting reforms. For example, in just two years we modernised communications in Afghanistan. Partnering with the minister of communications, I refused to offer sweetheart deal licences to private companies. Instead, we insisted they gain access to the Afghan market through a transparent bidding process. The number of mobile telephones in the country jumped from 100 in July 2002 to more than 1m at the end of 2005, and private investment in mobile phones exceeded \$200m (£141m, £121m). A government committed to transparency, accountability and the rule of law can create a stable, business-friendly environment in Afghanistan.

The right government can help Afghanistan tap its potential. The Afghan people are ready to learn, work and do business with the world.

The writer is a candidate in next week's Afghan presidential election

Afghan entrepreneurs are not short of money, but withering security and corruption force them to take their capital abroad

Meet the Clintons

The ongoing saga of Bill and Hillary just runs and runs

A former US ambassador to Nigeria and South Africa said this week that secretary of state Hillary Clinton's visit to Africa would be remembered for her "theme of better governance". In Africa, it may be.

She gave some good speeches about corruption and incompetence. But in the US, not a chance. There, her visit will be remembered for her gaffe over the US presidential election of 2000 and for her flash of anger over – what else? – her husband. The Clintons' soap opera just runs and runs.

You would need a heart of stone not to chuckle. It makes no difference what Mrs Clinton says or does. She only gets noticed when she makes a mistake or, at one remove, when the former president makes a splash. Her trip to Africa was first overshadowed by Mr Clinton's mission to North Korea. Then, in Africa, she tripped up twice, and the folks back home started paying attention to her tour.

At a press conference, she was asked what her husband thought about a policy matter. In fact, the translator got it wrong: the question was about what President Obama thought. Unaware, the top US diplomat tore into the questioner. "My husband is not secretary of state," she fumed. "I am. If

you want my opinion, I will tell you my opinion. I am not going to be channelling my husband".

In another error, she again forgot her US audience. She softened her criticism of Nigeria's flawed electoral process with a word of understanding. Nobody's perfect, she observed. In the US election of 2000, the result hung on votes in one state, whose governor was the brother of the successful candidate.

That election was a shambles, admittedly, but the parallel cannot be called close. And since when did the US secretary of state travel abroad to impugn US democracy? The remark struck many Americans as taking the empathy for which Mrs Clinton is noted too far.

In one way, of course, it is all quite trivial – and Mrs Clinton's frustration is understandable. But the US media's interest in the Clinton saga, Mr Obama's own zeal for globe-trotting, and the appointment of numerous foreign-policy advisers with a direct line to his office, all make the secretary of state's position awkward. Her evident inability to cope elegantly compounds the problem. If this keeps up, it will bring her effectiveness as secretary of state into question. Meantime, the US media need to grow up, and she needs to calm down.

Iran at the crossroads

Will the Islamic Republic go the way of the shah? There are reasons to think so.

Abolhassan Bani-Sadr

PARIS In the weeks since the Iranian election, the government of the Islamic Republic has been publicly divided, delegitimized and grown increasingly more weak. The current situation offers parallels with the political unrest leading up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ended the rule of the shah.

Historically, the Iranian government has enjoyed four sources of legitimacy: its competence in managing state affairs, its official religious authority, its commitment to Iran's independence, and its ability to provide a stable base of social support. All of these have now been irretrievably undone.

The massive vote rigging on June 12 brought President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's ability to run the state's affairs under intense public scrutiny, and the spontaneous uprising in its wake removed the government's political legitimacy.

Shortly afterwards, in a speech at Friday prayers, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, threatened a violent crackdown unless the official election results were accepted. This removed the last vestiges of the regime's religious legitimacy as well.

That legitimacy had been waning for some time, even within the regime and among Islamic traditionalists. Ayatollah Ali Sistani (the most prominent Shiite clergyman in Iraq) was opposed to the principle of *velayat-e faqih* (the rule of the clergy), and Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri (Khomeini's would-be successor who later became his critic) had argued that the doctrine was simply a proof of *shirk*, or false God-making. Moreover, the Constitution states unambiguously that the authority of the supreme leader, the president and the Parliament should emanate from the people's vote, not from God.

Apart from this, the regime has lost a key power base that has historically made despot-

ism possible in Iran — the economic rule of the bazaars and the large landowners. It has therefore bolstered itself with another tool of Iranian despotism: attempting to use the threat of foreign intervention to justify secret dealings and open crises with other states, primarily the United States.

George W. Bush's presidency was a fruitful time for the Iranian regime, as the constant menace of military action and economic sanctions strengthened its control over the population. Barack Obama's non-confrontational approach has placed the regime in a difficult

The political deadlock at the top has created an opening for the Iranian people to determine the outcome.

position. It can no longer portray itself as the defender of sovereign independence against foreign intrusion.

Finally, the regime's first and foremost base of support, the clergy, has been replaced by a military-financial mafia. The Revolutionary Guard now occupies the entire government and believes that

the clergy's task is not to run the country, but simply to lend its legitimacy to those who do.

Like the monarchy before it, the power of the present regime rests on both an internal and external foundation, which makes it vulnerable to public unrest. We can draw a comparison between Jimmy Carter's election in 1976 and Mr. Obama's in 2008. Iranians viewed Mr. Carter's election as a threat to the monarchy's main source of external power, U.S. support for the shah. In the same way, if Mr. Obama continues to abandon hawkish policies toward Iran and deprives the regime of the crisis factor, this uprising may follow a similar trajectory.

But the present movement differs from the unrest that led to the 1979 revolution in some important ways. While the first actions of dissent in 1979 came from outside the regime, the present opposition began within the regime it-

self, when the election was rigged against Mir Hussein Moussavi. While there are strong signs that the protest movement is growing, it still needs time to spread throughout the country.

Where might all this lead? In part, the future may depend on the outcome of a political deadlock created by Ayatollah Khamenei himself. The facts that the election was rigged and that Mr. Khamenei attempted to stage a "velvet coup d'état" have polarized both sides.

Changing position in either camp would be political suicide. Mr. Khamenei and Mr. Ahmadinejad cannot admit that they rigged the election, since doing so would strip them of whatever remains of their legal and political legitimacy. Former President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani is now under severe attack by Mr. Khamenei's supporters, and Mr. Moussavi and Mehdi Karubi, another presidential candidate, know that they will lose popular support and be at the mercy of the unforgiving regime if they submit to Mr. Khamenei's demands.

Several outcomes are possible. Historically, the regime's top tactic for maintaining control has been to divide the country's elites into two competing groups and eliminate one. Now, as this process has reached into the heart of the regime, that has become lethal. The regime's own cadres oppose Mr. Ahmadinejad, and the deepening economic crisis has deprived the regime of resources and spurred further public discontent. This has provided an opening in which the Iranian people can determine the outcome of the struggle.

If the people cease resisting, times will become even harder; if they continue, their uprising will be transformed into a full-fledged revolution. This would make the establishment of democracy a real possibility. And all indications point to the determination of the Iranian people to see this uprising through.

ABOLHASSAN BANI-SADR was the first president of Iran after the 1979 revolution.

GLOBAL VIEWPOINT / TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES

THE SETTLEMENTS ISSUE

Obama needs to explain to Israelis why freezing settlements and reviving peace talks is clearly in their interest.

The last American president to openly challenge Israel on settlements was George H. W. Bush and we commend President Obama for demanding that Israel halt all new construction. The controversy must not obscure Mr. Obama's real goal: nudging Israel and the Palestinians into serious peace negotiations.

Mr. Obama and his negotiator, George Mitchell, have focused on settlements after prying loose a commitment — highly caveated — from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to a two-state solution. The Palestinians insist they won't return to talks until all construction halts. The Americans have decided that a freeze is needed to show Palestinians and other Arabs that Israel's conservative government is serious about peace.

Less visibly, but we hope just as assertively, Washington is pressing the Palestinians and other Arab leaders to take concrete steps to demonstrate their commitment to a peace deal. Those must clearly contribute to Israel's sense of security.

Unless all sides deliver — the Palestinians, Arabs and Israelis — Mr. Obama's credibility and the credibility of the peace process will be undermined.

The ultimate question of who controls which land will have to be resolved at the peace table with border negotiations and land swaps. Right now, some 300,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank; 200,000 in East Jerusalem. And the continued expansion of Israeli settlements has led Palestinians to doubt they will ever be allowed to build a viable state. The issue has also given Arab states a convenient excuse for inaction.

While Israeli governments have repeatedly promised to halt settlement activity — and no new settlements have been approved in nearly two decades — existing ones have continued to mushroom with government incentives. Ac-

cording to Americans for Peace Now, an activist group, 4,560 new housing units were built when Ehud Olmert was prime minister. Mr. Netanyahu has rejected demands for a freeze and insisted that "natural growth" (to accommodate births) must be allowed.

Under pressure from Washington, Mr. Netanyahu's government has dangled a possible compromise: a temporary freeze in new construction, as long as 2,500 units now in process can be completed and Arab East Jerusalem is exempt. It is a weak offer.

While they press the Israelis, Mr. Obama and Mr. Mitchell are also asking the Palestinians and Arab states to do more. They are insisting that the Palestinians work harder to prevent incitement against Israel in schools and the media. They have asked Arab states — notably Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria — to signal the beginning of an acceptance by allowing Israel to fly commercial planes through Arab airspace or open government commercial offices in their capitals. They are also pressing Arab states to provide more aid for the fragile government of the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas.

Mr. Obama and Mr. Mitchell claim they are making progress, but there is little sign of it. Saudi Arabia, which has pushed Washington hard to revive negotiations, has been especially resistant. Mr. Mitchell would do well to remind them that a prolonged stalemate will only feed extremism across the region.

Israeli leaders do not often risk being at odds with an American president, but polls show broad support for Mr. Netanyahu's resistance. President Obama has started a constructive dialogue with the Islamic world. Now he needs to explain to Israelis why freezing settlements and reviving peace talks is clearly in their interest.

Malaysia cracks down on protests

BANGKOK

New government's vow to respect civil liberties in doubt after 600 arrests

BY THOMAS FULLER

Soon after coming to power four months ago, Najib Razak, the Malaysian prime minister, vowed to temper the country's repressive laws and respect civil liberties in a country where they have often been ignored.

But Malaysia's honeymoon of liberalism hit the rocks over the weekend when the police broke up a large rally in Kuala Lumpur, arresting nearly 600 people and reaffirming the governing party's longstanding policy of zero tolerance toward street protests.

Opposition parties, which organized the rally, were calling for the repeal of a law that allows the government to jail its critics indefinitely without charge. The opposition is also pressuring the government to expand an inquiry into the recent death under mysterious circumstances of a political aide after a late-night interrogation by anti-corruption officials.

News services estimated that the rally on Saturday, which was broken up by thousands of police officers using tear gas and water cannons, drew about 20,000 protesters, making it the largest demonstration in two years.

"We can provide them stadiums where they can shout themselves hoarse till dawn, but don't cause disturbance in the streets," Mr. Najib said, according to the Malaysian media.

Since taking office in April, Mr. Najib has gained favor with investors and the business community by partly dismantling a system of racial preferences that long caused resentment among the country's minorities.

He also released 13 political detainees held without trial. An opinion poll conducted in June showed 65 percent of respondents were happy with his performance. But more recently, Mr. Najib's government has been criticized for reverting to the authoritarian tactics of previous administrations.

A former health minister and stalwart of the governing coalition, Chua Jui Meng, defected to the opposition in July,



A protester in Kuala Lumpur holding a placard that translates as "detain without trial."

saying that Mr. Najib represented an "iron fist behind the velvet glove."

The mysterious death of the political aide, Teoh Beng Hock, in July has galvanized opposition parties and caused widespread outrage, especially among the minority Chinese community.

Mr. Teoh, a 30-year-old legislative aide in the opposition-controlled state of Selangor, was found dead beneath the 14-story window of the offices of the country's anti-corruption commission after a nightlong interrogation.

A government minister initially said that Mr. Teoh committed suicide, but his belt and back pockets were torn, adding

"The government's standing will hinge upon its ability to maintain economic growth and keep people employed."

to speculation that he may have been forced out the window.

After initial resistance, the government bowed to public pressure and ordered an inquiry into Mr. Teoh's death as well as the interrogation tactics of the anti-corruption officers.

Deaths in police custody have increased in recent years, according to Suaram, a human rights group. According to the Malaysian Home Ministry, 1,535 people died in police custody between 2003 and 2007, the latest year for which data is available.

In the case of Mr. Teoh, the opposition says the slow pace of the investigation — a police forensics team did not show up at the scene until three days after Mr. Teoh's body was discovered, according to Malaysian media — is at worst a cover-up or at best incompetence.

It is unclear how much the Teoh case and the suppression of the weekend protests will affect Mr. Najib's standing. For decades, Malaysians tolerated repressive policies in exchange for political stability and economic opportunity.

"The government's standing will hinge upon its ability to maintain economic growth and keep people employed," said Ibrahim Suffian, the director of the Merdeka Center, an independent polling agency. But, he said, politics in Malaysia are changing fast and the government can no longer count on "unquestioning loyalty and obedience."

"There is a perception that the law enforcement agencies are as much concerned in regime protection as citizens' protection," Mr. Ibrahim said. "This view seems to be gaining traction."

Mr. Najib's embattled political party, the United Malays National Organization, has been in power since independence from Britain five decades ago, but it faces a growing challenge from the opposition led by Anwar Ibrahim, a former finance minister.

Mr. Anwar's highly politicized trial on sodomy charges, which was expected to begin in July, has been delayed and may not begin for months.

Green shoots in Palestine



Thomas L. Friedman

RAMALLAH, WEST BANK In 2002, the U.N. Development Program released its first ever Arab Human Development Report, which bluntly detailed the deficits of freedom, women's empowerment and knowledge-creation holding back the Arab world. It was buttressed with sobering statistics: Greece alone translated five times more books every year from English to Greek than the entire Arab world translated from English to Arabic; the G.D.P. of Spain was greater than that of all 22 Arab states combined; 65 million Arab adults were illiterate. It was a disturbing picture, bravely produced by Arab academics.

Coming out so soon after 9/11, the report felt like a diagnosis of all the misgovernance bedeviling the Arab world, creating the pools of angry, unemployed youth, who become easy prey for extremists. Well, the good news is that the U.N. Development Program and a new group of Arab scholars last week came out with a new Arab Human Development report. The bad news: Things have gotten worse — and many Arab governments don't want to hear about it.

This new report was triggered by a desire to find out why the obstacles to human development in the Arab world have "proved so stubborn." What the roughly 100 Arab authors of the 2009 study concluded was that too many Arab citizens today lack "human security" — the kind of material and moral foundation that secures lives, liveli-

hoods and an acceptable quality of life for the majority." A sense of personal security — economic, political and social — "is a prerequisite for human development, and its widespread absence in Arab countries has held back their progress."

The authors cite a variety of factors undermining human security in the Arab region today — beginning with environmental degradation — the toxic combination of rising desertification, water shortages and population explosion. In 1980, the Arab region had 150 million people. In 2007, it was home to 317 million people, and by 2015 its population is projected to be 395 million. Some 60 percent of this population is under the age of 25, and they will need 51 million new jobs by 2020.

Another persistent source of Arab human insecurity is high unemployment. "For nearly two and half decades after 1980, the region witnessed hardly any economic growth," the report found. Despite the presence of oil money (or maybe because of it), there is a distinct lack of investment in scientific research, development, knowledge industries and innovation. Instead, government jobs and contracts dominate. Average unemployment in the Arab region in 2005 was 14.4 percent, compared with 6.3 percent for the rest of the world. A lot of this is because of a third source of human insecurity: autocratic and unrepresentative Arab governments, whose weaknesses "often combine to turn the state into a threat to human security, instead of its chief support."

The whole report would have left me feeling hopeless had I not come to Ramallah, the seat of Palestinian government in the West Bank, to find some good cheer. I'm serious.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to the wider Middle East what off-Broadway is to Broadway. It is where all good and bad ideas get tested out first. Well, the Palestinian prime minister, Salam

Fayyad, a former I.M.F. economist, is testing out the most exciting new idea in Arab governance ever. I call it "Fayyadism."

Fayyadism is based on the simple but all-too-rare notion that an Arab leader's legitimacy should be based not on slogans or rejectionism or personality cults or security services, but on delivering transparent, accountable administration and services.

Fayyad, a former finance minister who became prime minister after Hamas seized power in Gaza in June 2007, is unlike any Arab leader today. He is an ardent Palestinian nationalist, but his whole strategy is to say: The more we build our state with quality institutions — finance, police, social services — the sooner we will secure our right to independence. I see this as a challenge to "Arafatism," which focused on Palestinian rights first, state institutions later, if ever, and produced neither.

Things are truly getting better in the West Bank, thanks to a combination of Fayyadism, improved Palestinian security and a lifting of checkpoints by Israel. In all of 2008, about 1,200 new companies registered for licenses here. In the first six months of this year, almost 900 have registered. According to the I.M.F., the West Bank economy should grow by 7 percent this year.

Fayyad, famous here for his incorruptibility, says his approach is "to tell people who you are, what you are about and what you intend to do and then actually do it." At a time when all the big ideologies have failed to deliver for Arabs, Fayyad says he wants a government based on "legitimacy by achievement."

Something quite new is happening here. And given the centrality of the Palestinian cause in Arab eyes, if Fayyadism works, maybe it could start a trend in this part of the world — one that would do the most to improve Arab human security — good, accountable government.

Rethinking North Korea



Nicholas D. Kristof

Now that former President Bill Clinton has extricated Laura Ling and Euna Lee from North Korea, the hard work begins.

There are new indications that North Korea may be transferring nuclear weapons technology to Myanmar, the dictatorship also known as Burma, and that it earlier supplied a reactor to Syria. For many years, based on five visits to North Korea and its border areas, I've argued for a U.S. "engagement" approach toward Pyongyang, but now I've reluctantly concluded that we Americans need more sticks.

Burmese defectors have provided detailed accounts of a North Korean reactor, perhaps a mirror of the one provided to Syria, built inside a mountain deep in Myanmar. The reports, first aired in *The Sydney Morning Herald* this month, come from Desmond Ball, a respected Asia scholar, and Phil Thornton, a journalist with expertise on Myanmar, and there has been other fragmentary intelligence to back them up.

If the defectors' accounts are true, the reactor "could be capable of being operational and producing a bomb a year, every year, after 2014," Mr. Ball and Mr. Thornton wrote.

The suspicions may be false, and Iraq is a reminder that defector reports about W.M.D. can be wrong. But partly because the North Korean reactor in Syria (destroyed by Israeli bombing in 2007) caught intelligence agencies by surprise, everyone is taking the latest

reports seriously. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed concern about the transfer of nuclear technology from North Korea to Myanmar, without giving details.

All this was eerily foreshadowed by the North Koreans themselves. Michael Green, who ran Asian affairs for a time in the Bush White House, says that in March 2003, a North Korean official — with hands shaking — read out to him and other American officials a warning: We have a nuclear deterrent. If you don't end your hostile policy, we will demonstrate, expand and transfer it.

"They've done all those things," Mr. Green notes.

At times in the past, there seemed hope for diplomacy aimed at coaxing North Korea into giving up its nuclear program and joining the concert of nations. These days that seems virtually hopeless.

"Formal diplomatic engagement aimed at rolling back their nuclear program has run its course, at least for the time being," says Mitchell Reiss, a North Korea expert and former senior State Department official who is now at the College of William and Mary. "The facts have changed. You have to change your strategy."

In the past, Mr. Reiss focused on engagement. Now he advocates "hard containment" — toughened sanctions backed by military force if necessary.

The truth is that North Korea doesn't want to negotiate away its nuclear materials. It is focused on its own transition, and this year it has declined to accept a visit from the Obama administration's special envoy, Stephen Bosworth. The North isn't interested in "six-party talks" on nuclear issues; instead, it seeks talks with the U.S. conditioned on accepting North Korea's status as a nuclear power — which is unacceptable.

In recent months, North Korea has dismantled some economic reforms and economic cooperation projects with

South Korea. Meanwhile, it continues to counterfeit U.S. \$100 bills — the highest-quality goods that North Korea manufactures — and its embassies in Pakistan and other countries pay their way by smuggling drugs, liquor and currency. The North has released its American hostages but continues to hold South Koreans. And it's the most totalitarian state in history: In North Korean homes, I've seen the "speaker" on the wall that wakes people up with propaganda each morning. More bizarre, triplets are routinely taken from parents and raised by the state because they are considered auspicious.

There are no good options here, and a grass-roots revolution is almost impossible. North Koreans, even those in China who despise the regime, overwhelmingly agree that most ordinary North Koreans swallow the propaganda. Indeed, Kim Jong-il's approval rating in his country may well be higher than President Obama's is in the United States.

The best bet will be to continue to support negotiations, including a back channel that can focus on substance instead of protocol, as well as economic and cultural exchanges — but backed up by sticks. The Obama administration is now working with allies to reimpose economic and financial sanctions that a few years ago were very successful in squeezing the North Korean regime. China is surprisingly cooperative, even quietly intercepting several shipments of supplies useful for W.M.D. programs.

Where we have intelligence that North Korean ships are transferring nuclear materials or technology to a country like Myanmar or Iran, we should go further and board those vessels. That's an extreme step, but the nightmare would be if Iran simply decided to save time and buy a nuclear weapon or two from North Korea. The United States can't allow that to happen.

NEXT STEPS WITH NORTH KOREA

Bill Clinton's trip will have been worth the effort if it sets the stage for truly productive nuclear talks.

Sending a former president to secure the release of two journalists detained by North Korea was a big step, but Bill Clinton's trip will have been well worth the effort if it laid the groundwork for truly productive talks on North Korea's nuclear programs. Now it is up to President Obama to make it clear to Pyongyang that it is no longer good enough to make easily broken promises.

Even before Mr. Clinton's mission this week to rescue Laura Ling and Euna Lee from a 12-year sentence to North Korea's gulag, Obama administration officials concluded that Pyongyang was looking for a face-saving way to re-engage with Washington.

North Korea made a colossal mistake by getting off to a bad start with President Obama, who offered the kind of dialogue that President George W. Bush took far too long to embrace. The North Koreans responded by breaking off six-country negotiations, conducting a second nuclear test, and test-firing missiles. They also vowed to make more nuclear weapons and threatened military action against efforts to isolate it, and may have resumed nuclear fuel production. There are growing concerns about Pyongyang's willingness to sell missiles and other technology to other states.

We do not know the details of Mr. Clinton's meetings, but we hope they lead to future talks. That poses a challenge for Mr. Obama: While he must pursue this opening, he must not be so desperate for a deal that he lets North Korea set all the terms. He struck the right note when he told MSNBC on Wednesday that Mr. Clinton's mission had not eased the need for North Korea to alter its behavior if it wants a "path to better relations."

To start, that means not giving in to Pyongyang's desire to make the talks a bilateral process with Washington. It is imperative to keep South Korea, Japan, China and Russia — key participants in any effective deal — engaged. Officials from Washington and Pyongyang can still meet separately, as they did under Mr. Bush.

Most important, the United States and its partners need to make clear that the expectations are higher than they were before — that North Korea will not be rewarded again just for recommitting to promises that were broken before and likely will be broken again. Future steps toward disarmament must be irreversible.

Under a 2005 agreement, North Korea shut down its reactor at Yongbyon — the source of plutonium for its nuclear weapons — and promised to dismantle its bomb-making infrastructure. It has since kicked out international inspectors and claims to be rebuilding and resuming its capabilities. One way to make disablement more permanent: Pour concrete into the reactor core.

The United States and its partners also have to re-establish their credibility; North Korea never received all the fuel deliveries promised under the 2005 deal. At the same time, however, Washington and its partners must keep enforcing the tougher Security Council sanctions imposed on Pyongyang in June.

It is understandable to doubt that impoverished North Korea will ever abandon its nuclear program — its only form of leverage over the rest of the world. But patient — and firm — engagement backed by sanctions still offers the best path toward a peaceful solution, however tortuous it might be.

High-return diplomacy

Criticism of the Clintons' success in getting Pyongyang to free two Americans is misplaced.

Douglas H. Paal

WASHINGTON The criticisms from some of my fellow Republicans of former President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's success in gaining the release of two American journalists from North Korea's gulag are misplaced. The Clintons' behavior demonstrated respect for the expertise of their advisers and restraint from political grandstanding. Any propaganda gain for the North Korean regime will be short-term and limited. It's even possible that the episode will have a positive effect on our troubled nuclear negotiations.

Ever since the journalists, Laura Ling and Euna Lee, were captured on North Korea's border with China in March, America has had little diplomatic leverage. The Obama administration had two choices: to demand their release in a loud and threatening tone, or to use wits and discipline.

Some commentators are suggesting that the Clintons' actions showed American weakness by expressing regret to a ruthless dictator. These critics need to ask themselves: how would a more aggressive approach have gained the release of these two women from a sentence of 12 years of hard labor?

Previous episodes of Americans drifting into North Korea — including an American heli-

copter pilot captured in 1994 who was released after Bill Richardson, then a member of Congress, traveled to Pyongyang — have taught us the pattern.

First, North Korea protests the violations of its territory. Then it threatens or sentences the individuals. Finally, talks between North Korean diplomats, private intermediaries and American officials come up with a way for the North to climb down while saving face.

Bolstering the egos of Pyongyang's leaders is no pleasure. Look at Bill Clinton's grim expression in photos of him with Mr. Kim. But it is a proved means to a desired end.

The public stance of the Obama administration was dignified and correct throughout. Mrs. Clinton rightly acknowledged the prevailing legal system in North Korea in making a public plea for clemency, and Bill Clinton delivered the request in person.

The alternative — having administration officials rant about the many perversions of the North's system — would not have brought the journalists home.

The administration also deserves credit for insisting that these negotiations had nothing to do with efforts to penalize North Korea for its belligerence. It pressed hard for two sets of sanctions at the United Nations Security Council after North Korea's test firing of a long-range missile in April and nuclear test in May.

Will Mr. Clinton's visit be a turning point in relations with North Korea? That is more up to

Pyongyang than Washington. Kim Jong-il, who is reported to have had a stroke last year, looks frail but he is not necessarily dying. He seems to have completed his efforts to rally military support for his plan to have his 26-year-old son succeed him. He may be ready now to turn a more cooperative face to the outside world, if only for domestic political reasons.

In any new talks, of course, we can expect Pyongyang to try all sorts of diplomatic reversals to increase its leverage and gain bigger payoffs.

Fortunately, the Obama administration has proved itself wary. For example, it has refused the North's offers to resume bilateral negotiations unless Pyongyang agrees to return to the agreements reached during now-stalled six-party talks.

If tensions begin to cool and North Korea shows itself more open to legitimate talks, then the Clinton diplomacy will have helped to produce unexpected dividends. For the moment, however, it is enough to have two of our citizens back from the gates of Hell with America's dignity intact.

DOUGLAS H. PAAL is the vice president of studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He served on the National Security Council staffs of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush and was the top American representative to Taiwan under President George W. Bush.

No rush to talk

**NORTH
KOREA II:**

There are reasons to negotiate, but diplomats will never get the regime to give up its nuclear weapons.

Andrei Lankov

Bill Clinton's trip to Pyongyang and the release of the American journalists confirmed what many observers have suspected since early July: North Korea is indicating its willingness to re-start talks with the United States. There are reasons why Washington should not rush to the negotiation table immediately, but few people doubt that these talks will start relatively soon.

The negotiations are likely to be characterized as talks about getting the North to give up its nuclear weapons. But one should not be misled: No amount of diplomatic dealing can achieve that goal.

North Korea's leaders have good reasons to retain their nuclear program. First, they need a deterrent against foreign attack. Second, they need nuclear arms for domestic purposes: The nuclear weapons program is perhaps the only visible success of Kim Jong-il's rule. (It also serves as a helpful excuse for the regime's economic calamities).

But, above all, the nuclear program is a powerful diplomatic tool. North Korea cannot survive without foreign aid, which the regime uses to support those social groups whose loyalty is vital for internal stability. And nothing can rival a latent nuclear threat as means to obtain foreign aid.

It is often argued that North Korea might choose to surrender its nuclear weapons in exchange for a massive aid program. But Pyongyang cannot use the aid to kick-start its economy, because its leaders believe that economic reforms will be politically ruinous. Chinese-style reforms require a great deal of political liberalization. The spread of information about South Korea's economic success and political freedom would deliver a mortal blow to the regime's legitimacy.

In this situation, the most rational policy choice of the tiny Pyongyang elite is to avoid domestic reforms, keep interaction with the outside world at a bare minimum and, of course, engage in nuclear blackmail. The regime can alternate threats with hints at a possible solution, and even make promises of a complete de-nuclearization at some future point. The North has played this game for nearly two decades, with remarkable success.

As long as the country remains under the current regime's control, negotiations are not going to produce a non-nuclear North Korea. Nevertheless, there are at least four major reasons why North Korea should be engaged.

First, some useful compromises are achievable. It is possible to devise an agreement that would diminish the likelihood of nuclear proliferation by Pyongyang. After all, North Korean leaders understand that their current stockpile of weapons-grade plutonium is sufficient as a deterrent and blackmail tool, so additional production would not make much difference. They might even agree to demolish their Yongbyon research facilities, if the promised payoff is sufficiently high.

Second, talks lessen tensions and decrease the likelihood of a confrontation. Of course, Pyongyang diplomats might at any time resort to their favorite trick: Walk away from negotiations, launch a chain of provocations to increase tensions, and then return to negotiations in expectations of greater payoffs. But while talks are continuing, an accidental confrontation is less likely.

Third, talks will provide a line of communication that might become vital, since big changes are looming in Pyongyang: Recent photos leave no doubt that Kim Jong Il's health has deteriorated considerably.

Perhaps the most important reason why Pyongyang should be engaged is the long-term domestic impact of talks. Negotiations and aid create an environment where contacts between the isolated population and the outside world steadily increase, exposing the total lie in which North Koreans have to live. In the long run, this will undermine the regime, bringing the country's radical transformation — and, probably, a solution of the nuclear issue.

Nonetheless, future talks should be conducted without unrealistic expectations. There will be no breakthrough as long as the present regime runs the country. To keep Pyongyang engaged, something has to be given, but excessive generosity is not advisable: It will merely provoke more exercises in blackmail. There also is no need to hurry. It's time to realize that the North Korean problem has no quick fixes, but it can — and should — be managed.

ANDREI LANKOV is an associate professor at Kookmin University in Seoul and the author of several books about North Korea.

MONDAY, AUGUST 10, 2009

More green shoots



Thomas L. Friedman

RAMALLAH, WEST BANK Ever since the collapse of the Oslo peace accords in 2000, and the horror-show violence that followed, there has been only one thing to say about the West Bank: Nothing ever changes here, except for the worst. That is just not the case anymore — much to my surprise.

For Palestinians, long trapped between burgeoning Israeli settlements and an Israeli occupation army, subject to lawlessness in their own cities and the fecklessness of their own political leadership, life has clearly started to improve a bit, thanks to a new virtuous cycle: improved Palestinian policing that has led to more Palestinian investment and trade that has led to the Israeli Army dismantling more checkpoints in the West Bank that has led to more Palestinian travel and commerce.

Because the West Bank today is largely hidden from Israelis by a wall, Israelis are just starting to learn from their own press what is going on there. On July 31, many Israelis were no doubt surprised to read this quote in the *Maariv* daily from Omar Hashim, deputy chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of Nablus, the commercial center of the West Bank: "Traders here are satisfied," said Hashim. "Their sales are rising. They feel that life is returning to normal. There is a strong sense of optimism."

Make no mistake: Palestinians still want the Israeli occupation to end, and their own state to emerge, tomorrow. That is not going to happen. But for the first time since Oslo, there is an eco-

nomics-security dynamic emerging on the ground in the West Bank that has the potential — the potential — to give the post-Yasser Arafat Palestinians another chance to build the sort of self-governing authority, army and economy that are prerequisites for securing their own independent state. A Palestinian peace partner for Israel may be taking shape again.

The key to this rebirth was the recruitment, training and deployment of four battalions of new Palestinian National Security Forces — a move spearheaded by President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority. Trained in Jordan in a program paid for by the U.S., three of these battalions have fanned out since May 2008 and brought order to the major Palestinian towns: Nablus, Jericho, Hebron, Ramallah, Jenin and Bethlehem.

These N.S.F. troops, who replaced either Israeli soldiers or Palestinian gangs, have been warmly received by the locals. Recently, N.S.F. forces wiped out a Hamas cell in Qalqilya, and took losses themselves. The death of the Hamas fighters drew nary a peep, but a memorial service for the N.S.F. soldiers killed drew thousands of people. For the first time, I've heard top Israeli military officers say these new Palestinian troops are professional and for real.

The Israeli Army's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, has backed that up by taking down roughly two-thirds of the 41 manned checkpoints Israel set up around the West Bank, many since 2000, to stifle Palestinian suicide bombers. Those checkpoints — where Palestinians often had to wait for two hours to just pass from one city to the next and often could not drive their own cars through but had to go from cab to cab — choked Palestinian commerce. Israel is also again letting Israeli Arabs drive their own cars into the West Bank on Saturdays to shop.

"You can feel the movement," said Olafat Hammad, the associate director of

the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, who lives in Nablus and works in Ramallah. "It is not a burden anymore to move around to Ramallah for business meetings and social meetings." Nablus recently opened its first multiplex, "Cinema City," as well

An economic-security dynamic is emerging in the West Bank that could pave the way to a Palestinian state.

as a multistory furniture mart designed to cater to Israelis. Ramallah's real estate prices have skyrocketed.

"I have had a 70 percent increase in sales," *Maariv* quoted a Nablus shoe store owner as saying. "People are coming from the villages nearby, and from other cities in the West Bank and from Israel."

But men and women do not live by shoe sales alone. The only way the Palestinian leadership running this show can maintain its legitimacy is if it is eventually given political authority, not just policing powers, over the West Bank — or at least a map that indicates they are on a pathway there.

"Our people need to see we are governing ourselves and are not simply subcontractors for Israeli security," Prime Minister Fayyad told me. Khalil Shikaki, a leading Palestinian pollster, added that Abbas and Fayyad want "to be seen as building a Palestinian state — not security without a state." That is why "there has to be political progress alongside the security progress. Without it, it hurts them very much."

America must nurture this virtuous cycle: more money to train credible Palestinian troops, more encouragement for Israel's risk-taking in eliminating checkpoints, more Palestinian economic growth and quicker negotiations on the contours of a Palestinian state in the West Bank. Hamas and Gaza can join later. Don't wait for them. If we build it, they will come.

MORE THAN MISSILES

Force alone will not be enough to defeat the extremists in Pakistan. America must send more development aid.

With the apparent killing of the Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud by an American drone, President Obama seems to be having some success with his military policy for Pakistan. He is having less luck in Washington.

Congress left town for its summer recess without passing a long-promised bill to triple American economic and development assistance to Pakistan — the centerpiece of Mr. Obama's plan to win the hearts and minds of the Pakistani people.

The drone strike came after months of improved cooperation between American and Pakistani intelligence officials. Mr. Mehsud and his network have orchestrated a bloody reign of terror across Pakistan and are blamed for the 2007 assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister, and last year's bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, which left more than 50 people dead. Permanently removing him from the picture would be an obvious victory.

However, force alone will not be enough to defeat the extremists. During the 2008 campaign, Mr. Obama rightly criticized the Bush administration for overinvesting in Pakistan's army while doing far too little to help build up its civil society — the schools, courts, hospitals and roads that are essential to stability. Mr. Obama pledged to support legislation — which was initially sponsored by then-Senator Joseph Biden and Senator Richard Lugar — that would provide Pakistan with \$7.5 billion in development assistance over five years.

The aid — and particularly its pledge of five years of uninterrupted help — is intended to demonstrate that this time

Washington is in for the long haul. Many Pakistanis still accuse the Americans of using and then abandoning them after the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan. We fear that any more delay on the promised assistance would only reinforce that suspicion and bitterness.

The House and Senate did manage to pass bills authorizing the aid, but with significant differences.

Both versions contained sound conditions and benchmarks to try to measure the effectiveness of the help. But the House added a variety of other provisions, including earmarks for military projects that favored American contractors and bullying language on Pakistan's nuclear program that would inevitably increase tensions with Islamabad and alienate the Pakistani public. We, too, are very concerned about Pakistan's history of nuclear proliferation. But this aid bill is clearly not the vehicle.

Inexplicably, the White House, which insists that bringing stability to Afghanistan and Pakistan is a top national security priority, did not press the leadership to finish the legislation. By the time negotiators managed to find a compromise, it was too late for a vote.

When Congress returns in September, lawmakers and the White House must make passing the aid bill a top priority. Congress must also pass long-stalled legislation to establish special trade preference zones in parts of Pakistan to help create jobs.

As President Obama said when he endorsed the aid bill, "Al Qaeda offers the people of Pakistan nothing but destruction. We stand for something different." It is time to show the Pakistani people that America has more to offer than missile strikes and empty promises.

The two-state solution's many flaws

Hussein Agha
Robert Malley

The two-state solution has welcomed two converts. In recent weeks, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, and Khaled Meshal, the head of Hamas's political bureau, have indicated they now accept what they had long rejected. This nearly unanimous consensus is the surest sign to date that the two-state solution has become void of meaning, a catchphrase divorced from the contentious issues it is supposed to resolve. Everyone can say yes because saying yes no longer says much, and saying no has become too costly. Acceptance of the two-state solution signals continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle by other means.

Bowing to U.S. pressure, Mr. Netanyahu conceded the principle of a Palestinian state, but then described it in a way that stripped it of meaningful sovereignty. In essence, and with minor modifications, his position recalled that of Israeli leaders who preceded him. A state, he pronounced, would have to be demilitarized, without control over borders or airspace. Jerusalem would remain under Israeli sovereignty, and no Palestinian refugees would be allowed back to Israel. His emphasis was on the caveats rather than the concession.

As for Hamas, recognition of the state of Israel remains taboo. Until recently, the movement had hinted it might acquiesce to Israel's de facto existence and resign itself to establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. This sentiment has now grown from hint to certitude.

President Obama's June address in Cairo provoked among Hamas leaders a mix of anticipation and apprehension. The president criticized the movement but did not couple his mention of Hamas with the term terrorism. His

recitation of the prerequisites for engagement bore the sound of a door cracked open rather than one slammed shut, and his acknowledgment that the Islamists enjoyed the support of some Palestinians was grudging but charitable by U.S. standards. All of which was promising but also foreboding, prompting reflection within Hamas over how to escape international confinement without betraying core beliefs.

The result of this deliberation was Hamas's message that it would adhere to the internationally accepted wisdom — a Palestinian state within the borders of 1967, the year Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza. Hamas also coupled its concession with caveats aplenty, demanding full Israeli withdrawal, full Palestinian sovereignty and respect for the refugees' rights. In this, there was little to distinguish its position from conventional Palestinian attitudes.

The dueling discourses speak to something far deeper than and separate from Palestinian statehood. Mr. Netanyahu underscores that Israel must be recognized as a Jewish state — and recalls that the conflict began before the West Bank or Gaza were occupied. Palestinians, in turn, reject recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, uphold the refugees' rights and maintain that if Israel wants real closure, it will need to pay with more than mere statehood.

The exchange brings the conflict back to its historical roots and touches its raw emotional core. It can be settled, both sides implicitly concur, only by looking past the occupation to questions born in 1948 — Arab rejection of the newborn Jewish state and the dispossession and dislocation of Palestinian refugees.

Both positions enjoy broad support within their respective communities. Few Israelis quarrel with the insistence that Israel be recognized as a Jewish state. It encapsulates their profound aspiration for a presence in the land of their forebears — for an end to Arab questioning of Israel's legitimacy, the specter of the Palestinian refugees' return and any irreducible sentiment among Israel's Arab citizens.

Even fewer Palestinians take issue with the categorical rebuff of that demand, as the recent Fatah congress in Bethlehem confirmed. In their eyes, to accept Israel as a Jewish state would legitimize the Zionist enterprise that brought about their tragedy. Their firmness on the principle of their right of return flows from the belief that the 1948 war led to unjust displacement and that, whether or not refugees choose or are allowed to return to their homes, they can never be deprived of that natural right. The modern Palestinian national movement, embodied in the Palestine Liberation Organiza-

tion, has been, above all, a refugee movement — led by refugees and focused on their plight.

It's easy to wince at these stands. They run against the grain of a peace process whose central premise is that ending the occupation and establishing a viable Palestinian state will bring this matter to a close. But to recall the origins of the clash is not to invent a new battle line. It is to resurrect an old one that did not disappear simply because powerful parties acted for some time as if it had ceased to exist.

Over the past two decades, the origins of the conflict were swept under the carpet as the struggle assumed the narrower shape of the post-1967 territorial tug-of-war over the West Bank and Gaza. The two protagonists, each for its own reason, along with the international community, implicitly agreed to deal with the

battle's latest, most palpable expression. The hope was that addressing the status of the West Bank and Gaza would dispense with the need to address the issues that predated the occupation and could outlast it.

The key isn't in resolving Palestinian borders, but in how to define Israel.

That so many attempts to resolve the conflict have

failed is reason to be wary. It is almost as if the parties, whenever they inch toward an artful compromise, are inexorably drawn back to the ghosts of the past. It is hard today to imagine a resolution that does not entail two states. But two states may not be a true resolution if the roots of this clash are ignored. The ultimate territorial outcome almost certainly will be found within the borders of 1967. To be sustainable, it will need to grapple with matters left over since 1948. The first step will be to recognize that in the hearts and minds of Israelis and Palestinians, the fundamental question is not about the details of an apparently practical solution. It is an existential struggle between two worldviews.

For years, virtually all attention has been focused on the question of a future Palestinian state, its borders and powers. As Israelis make plain by talking about the imperative of a Jewish state, and as Palestinians highlight when they evoke the refugees' rights, the heart of the matter is not necessarily how to define a state of Palestine. It is, as in a sense it always has been, how to define the state of Israel.

HUSSEIN AGHA is a co-author, with Ahmed S. Khalidi, of "A Framework for a Palestinian National Security Doctrine." ROBERT MALLEY is the director of the Middle East program at the International Crisis Group.

Pressuring the Burmese junta

The verdict on Aung San Suu Kyi should not be the main focus of world attention.

Jared Genser

While the predictable condemnation echo around the world after the Burmese junta's sentencing of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to an additional 18 months under house arrest, it may be surprising to hear that, as her international counsel, I would urge caution against focusing too heavily on her plight to the exclusion of the broader situation in Myanmar.

This is not because there is anything remotely just about the outcome of her trial. Indeed, the junta charged Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi with violating the terms of her house arrest during a sixth year of detention when the law under which she was imprisoned limited her house arrest to five years. The junta blamed her for being in contact with an American intruder in her home when it had exclusive security responsibility for her premises. And her trial had deep procedural flaws, including a lack of regular access to her counsel and unjustified denial of proposed defense witnesses. Moreover, it was closed on all but a handful of occasions to outside observers.

For these reasons, we immediately filed a petition to the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention requesting what would be a sixth judgment that the terms of her imprisonment are in clear violation of both Burmese and international law.

Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi herself has repeatedly urged that the international focus not be on her

alone. The junta has released her on two previous occasions to relieve intense international pressure, and then used the reduced international focus to clamp down further on its people. The reality is that her freedom will not necessarily yield any real progress in achieving a comprehensive solution to Myanmar's turmoil. Her situation must be seen in the context of the suffering of Myanmar's 47 million people under an authoritarian and inept junta.

Few regimes are as illegitimate and cruel as Gen. Than Shwe's. Since Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi was first detained before the 1990 elections, more than 3,000 villages have been destroyed under the military's campaign of killing, torture and rape against ethnic minorities, as reported by Human Rights Watch. One million refugees have fled the country while hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people struggle to subsist in jungle conditions.

Rape is systematically employed as a weapon of war against ethnic minority women, according to groups such as the Shan Women's Action Network. Last year, when Myanmar was devastated by Cyclone Nargis, the international community had to beg the junta to allow it to save its own people.

Even if Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi had been released, nothing would have changed. Some 2,100 political prisoners would remain imprisoned. The junta would continue to move toward 2010 elections based on an illegitimate constitution that is designed to make its rule permanent. And the regime's systematic human rights abuses would persist.

All these reasons — not merely Mrs. Aung

San Suu Kyi's new sentence — demonstrate that Myanmar's junta constitutes a threat to world peace and security meriting urgent international engagement.

What should be done?

First, the U.N. Security Council must use the international focus on Myanmar created by Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi's sentencing as an opportunity to revisit its prior demands to the junta, which have not been met, including the release of all political prisoners, open access for humanitarian aid, a movement toward national reconciliation and a restoration of democracy. As a stop-gap measure against human rights abuses, the Security Council should adopt a global arms embargo on the Burmese junta.

Second, Ban Ki-moon, the U.N. secretary general, should press the junta to respond to his requests for reform, which he presented on a recent visit to the country.

Third, the United States, the European Union and allies such as Australia and Canada should urge China, India and the Association of South-east Asian Nations to make clear to the junta that repeated flouting of U.N. demands make defending the regime increasingly difficult.

There are no easy answers to the problems in Myanmar. But it is well understood what needs to be done. The sentencing of Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi has provided a clear opportunity for action. Now, it is up to the international community to move beyond words of condemnation.

JARED GENSER is president of Freedom Now and serves as international counsel to Mrs. Aung San Suu Kyi.

Burmese Justice

Tuesday's sentencing by a Burmese court of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to three years of hard labor is a fresh reminder of the ruling junta's cruelty. That the sentence was then magnanimously reduced to an 18-month extension of her house arrest is a reminder of its cynicism.

Ms. Suu Kyi is Burma's rightful prime minister, having been elected in a vote overturned by the junta in 1990. The latest verdict ensures that the regime will get through parliamentary elections scheduled for next year without her participation. It's also a signal to the world that the junta isn't about to reach for any reset buttons, even as the Obama administration attempts to do so through a policy review that has been dragging on since February.



Aung San Suu
Kyi

As the Obama team ponders its position, it's useful to consider the policies that have come before. The United States has imposed investment sanctions on Burma since 1997. Those sanctions have multiplied along with the junta's brutality. In 2003, after an assassination attempt on Ms. Suu Kyi, Congress passed the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act which banned imports from Burma into the U.S. In 2008, following violent suppression of the previous year's peaceful "saffron revolution," the JADE act placed sanctions on Burmese gems. President George W. Bush also signed targeted financial sanctions aimed at individuals in the Burmese military elite and their associated businesses.

Burma's junta has mostly shrugged off Western sanctions thanks to billions in sales of natural gas to China and Thailand, along with sales of timber and

gems. Some of those sanctions have achieved little except to further impoverish the Burmese people and should be lifted. But the targeted sanctions have been more effective and could be tightened. No less valuable are Burmese language broadcasts of Radio Free Asia, which are vital in breaking the regime's monopoly on information.

Now the junta is becoming as much a menace to its neighborhood as it already is to its people. Burma is getting nuclear technology from Russia and possibly North Korea. Burmese and North Korean officials have signed an agreement on military cooperation, according to reports from the Burmese exile community. In July, a North Korean ship heading to Burma—presumably bearing arms—was tailed by a U.S. warship until it turned back. Burma is also a hub for drug and human trafficking, taking in as much as \$2 billion annually from exports of narcotics like opium and methamphetamine,

according to U.S. Congressional reports.

In response, the Obama Administration and Democratic allies in Congress seem inclined to introduce more sweeteners into the mix. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hinted last month at the possibility of "investment" and "other exchanges" for Burma if Ms. Suu Kyi was freed. Today, U.S. Senator Jim Webb will travel to Burma, the first visit by a U.S. Senator in over a decade. Not a bad photo-op for a regime that last year impounded humanitarian aid for more than 100,000 victims of Cyclone Nargis.

The danger here is that the junta will use these visits, along with next year's elections, to generate a chimera of democracy—generously subsidized by foreign aid—on the model of Hun Sen's regime in nearby Cambodia. For the sake of Ms. Suu Kyi and every other imprisoned Burmese dissident, we hope the Obama Administration doesn't conclude from all this that now is the time to engage.

Throwing Ahmadinejad a lifeline

A gasoline embargo would give Iran's hard-liners exactly what they need.

Hossein Askari
Trita Parsi

In an effort to squeeze Iran into submission over its nuclear policy, Congress and the White House are edging toward a gasoline embargo. This would do nothing to force Iran into submission. In fact, it would be a blessing for the hard-line government to once again be able to point to a foreign threat to justify domestic repression and consolidate its base at a time when opposition to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is increasing among conservatives.

An effective gasoline embargo can only be implemented through a naval blockade. This would require U.N. Security Council approval — a tortuous process with no certain outcome. An embargo without U.N. approval is an act of war according to international law, and Iran has declared that it would be met with force.

But even if the Security Council were to miraculously unite, success would still be out of reach. The economics of a gasoline embargo simply doesn't make sense. Iran imports roughly 40 percent of its domestic gasoline consumption at world prices and then sells it along with domestically refined gasoline at a government-subsidized price of about 40 cents per gallon. As a result, domestic gasoline consumption is high. It is also smuggled and sold to neighboring countries.

Over the past 10 years, this policy has cost Iran in the range of 10 to 20 percent of its G.D.P. annually, depending on world prices and the government-mandated pump price. Yes, a whopping 10 to 20 percent of G.D.P. In need of additional revenues, the regime has wanted to eliminate this subsidy, raise the price to world levels and reduce consumption, but has been paralyzed by the specter of a domestic backlash.

Even assuming that a gasoline embargo would be effective, what would be its result? Consumption would decline by 40 percent and government revenues would go up, because no

payment would be needed for gasoline imports.

If Tehran allowed the reduced supply of gasoline to be sold at a price that would equate demand to supply, the price would increase to a level that would eliminate the subsidy, meaning no subsidy for imported gasoline and no subsidy for domestically refined gasoline. The government would have more revenue to spend elsewhere. The sanctions would have done what Tehran has wanted to do for years and the government would not be held responsible!

What about the political fallout? Proponents of the embargo believe that increased economic pressure would cause Iranians to revolt against their unpopular rulers. This is a fundamental misreading of the psychology of an em-



AL JABBARO

bargoed people.

Iranians have suffered tremendous hardships under the Islamic Republic. And while the Iranian economy is in tatters today, Iranians have seen much worse times. During the Iran-Iraq War, they faced unprecedented economic hardships. This did not ignite a popular uprising.

What caused Iranians to rise up two months ago was not economic hardship, but anger over the fraudulent election.

If the back of the Iranian economy is broken, the first casualty will be hope. Economic misery will kill people's faith in a better future. The result will be political apathy. And rather than blaming Mr. Ahmadinejad, Iranians are likely to blame the United States.

Moreover, Iran's ruling hard-liners are in disarray. The politics of fear is their bread and butter; they have long benefited from invoking foreign plots and Washington's discredited regime-change policy. But now — with President Obama's new outreach to Iran — the hard-liners have lost their 9/11. President Obama has deprived them of their perennial boogeyman.

This has helped the opposition find the maneuverability to challenge Iran's vote-robbers. The hard-liners have no credible threat to rally around. Their disgraceful show trials on Iranian TV reveal their desperation. This has not only allowed fissures between various factions in Iran to grow, but also increased tensions among the conservatives themselves.

Mr. Ahmadinejad is desperately in need of a threat to help consolidate his conservative base and lend credibility to accusations of conspiracy against his moderate opposition. Imposing a gasoline embargo could be his last, best hope. Congress and the White House should think long and hard before throwing a lifeline to Iran's vote-robbers.

HOSSEIN ASKARI is professor of international business and international affairs at the George Washington University. TRITA PARSI is president of the National Iranian American Council and author of "Treacherous Alliance — The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the United States."

Defectors tell of Myanmar nuclear plans

Sydney

AFP-JJI

North Korea is helping Myanmar build a secret nuclear reactor and plutonium extraction plant to build an atomic bomb within five years, a report said Saturday, citing the evidence of defectors.

The nuclear complex is hidden inside a mountain at Naung Laing, in Myanmar's north, and runs parallel to a civil reactor being built at another site by Russia, according to the Sydney Morning Herald.

The revelations come just weeks after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton voiced concerns that Pyongyang was transferring weapons and nuclear technology to fellow pariah state Myanmar.

The defectors, code-named Moe Jo and Tin Min, reportedly told Australian investigator Desmond Ball the military junta has nuclear ambitions that far exceed its official line.

"They say it's to produce medical isotopes for health purposes in hospitals," Ball said Tin Min told him, talking about the prospect of a Myanmar nuclear program.

"How many hospitals in Burma have nuclear science?" Tin Min allegedly said, referring to Myanmar by its former name. "Burma can barely get electricity up and running. It's nonsense."

Giving an account of the men's testimony in the Sydney Morning Herald, Ball said they "claim to know the regime's plans" and that a nuclear-armed Myanmar is a "genuine possibility."

"In the event that the testimony of the defectors are proved, the alleged secret reactor could be capable of being operational and producing one bomb a year, every year, after 2014," Ball, a strategic studies professor at Australian National University, wrote.

Moe Jo, a former army officer, allegedly told Ball he was trained for a 1,000-man "nuclear battalion" and that Myanmar had provided yellow-cake uranium to North Korea and Iran.

"He said that the army planned a plutonium reprocessing system and that Russian experts were on site to show how it was done," Ball wrote.

Moe Jo said part of the army's nuclear battalion is stationed in a local village to work on a weapon, and a secret operations center is hidden in the Setkhaya Mountains, according to Ball.

"(It was) a set up including engineers, artillery and communications to act as a command and control center for the nuclear weapons program," wrote Ball.

Tin Min was said to have been a bookkeeper for Tay Za, a close associate of the junta's head, Senior Gen. Than Shwe, and told Ball in 2004 he had paid a construction company to build a tunnel in the Naung Laing mountain "wide enough for two trucks to pass each other."

According to the report, Tin Min said Za negotiated nuclear contracts with Russia and North Korea and arranged the collection and transport, at night and by river, of containers of equipment from North Korean boats in Yangon's port.

One Europe in one confusing world order

Dominique Moisi
Paris

G-8, G-5, G-20, G-2, G-3, and now the G-14 (Group of Eight plus the Group of Five plus Egypt): Never have the "mathematics" of world order seemed more complex and confusing.

Kofi Annan, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the United Nations in 2005, attempted to adjust the multilateral institutions of our world to fit its new realities. It was a brave effort that came too soon. The industrial world was not yet ready to recognize the new weight of the emerging powers and the need to strike a new balance between North and South. East and West.

Has the current financial and economic crisis, given its traumatic depth and the obvious responsibility of the United States as its source, created the necessary conditions and a more favorable climate for a major re-foundation of the multilateral institutions? It is too early to be confident that true change will come. What is certain is that a rebalancing between North and South must start with an honest and hardheaded look at Europe's current status in our multilateral system.

Nowadays, there is both too much and too little Europe, or, to put it differently, too many European countries are represented in the world's premier forums, with too many voices. But, in terms of weight and influence, there is not enough united Europe.

In the early 1980s, former French Foreign Minister Jean Francois-Poncet suggested that France and Britain give up their seats on the U.N. Security Council in favor of a single European Union seat. Germany would no longer seek a seat, Italy would not feel left out, and Europe's international identity would be strengthened in a spectacular way.

Of course, this was not to be. France and Britain were not willing to give up the

symbol of their nuclear and international status. They are probably even less willing to do so today in the name of a union that is less popular than ever, at least in the British Isles.

But let's be reasonable: The absurdity of Italy's presence in the G-8, together with the lack of official membership for countries such as China, India and Brazil, is no longer acceptable or tenable. Because of that anomaly, Europe suffers from a grave deficit of legitimacy and presence internationally.

Of course, the U.S. cannot be compared with a union that is nowhere near becoming a United States of Europe. But if the contrast between the two sides of the Atlantic — between the continent of "Yes, we can" and the continent of "Yes, we should" — is so immense, it is for reasons that Europeans are refusing to face or even to discuss.

The first one is the EU's lack of anything that incarnates it. It would be absurd to set U.S. President Barack Obama and EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso against each other as equals. Whereas Obama owes his election in large part to his charisma, Barroso is likely to succeed himself precisely because of his lack of charisma, because he says very little in so many languages. For national leaders in the EU whose last ambition is to have to deal with a new Jacques Delors, i.e., a man with ideas of his own, a cipher like Barroso is just the man for the job.

On the other hand, the EU is paying a steep price for the bureaucratic anonymity of its leaders. A process of escalating alienation and indifference between the EU and its citizens is at work, illustrated by low turnout in the last European Parliament elections. As a result, there is less union in Europe and less Europe in the world.

A strong European voice, such as Nicolas Sarkozy's during the French presidency of the EU, may make a

difference, but only for six months, and at the cost of reinforcing other European countries' nationalist feelings in reaction to the expression of "Gallic pride."

If Europeans want to regain self-confidence, pride and collective hope, they must seize the opportunity that the necessary and inevitable adjustment of the multilateral system represents for them. They should make necessity an opportunity. Of course, a single European voice in the major multilateral institutions appears more unrealistic than ever: Who wants it, except maybe the EU's smaller members?

But Europe's last chance to be a credible actor in a multipolar world rests precisely on its ability to present a single, united, responsible voice. Europe currently exists as an economic actor, not as an international political actor.

If Europeans were to set for themselves the goal of speaking with one voice, of having one representative in the spectrum of multilateral institutions — starting with the U.N. Security Council — they would be taken more seriously. In this case, one can really say that "less is more." Such a move would be deemed premature by numerous critics.

Twenty years ago, right after the fall of the Berlin Wall, one could say "I want Europe so much that I am willing to accept one Germany" — a revolutionary move if one had in mind the French writer Francois Mauriac's famous joke, "I like Germany so much, I want two of them."

In today's global age, with the rise of emerging powers and the relative decline of the West, the only Europe that will be taken seriously is a Europe that can speak and be seen as one.

Dominique Moisi is visiting professor of government at Harvard and author, most recently, of "The Geopolitics of Emotion."
© 2009 Project Syndicate
(www.project-syndicate.org)

Let's raise the right issues with North Korea

Roberta Cohen
Washington
THE WASHINGTON POST

The defunct six-party talks in which the United States, South Korea, Japan, Russia and China participated focused almost exclusively on North Korea's nuclear weapons program. But with a struggle for succession under way in Pyongyang and some of the country's internal controls reportedly beginning to erode, it's time to rethink the near-exclusion of human rights from the U.S.-North Korean dialogue.

The fear of raising human rights issues has been based largely on the belief that doing so would distract from efforts to disable North Korea's nuclear weapons program. But past negotiations focused narrowly on nuclear weapons have not produced sustainable outcomes, and they are unlikely to do so in the future unless they are grounded in a broader and more solid framework. Discussions about access to North Korea and the freer movement of people, information and ideas across its borders are needed to reinforce nuclear verification and inspections. The nature of the North Korean regime has bearing on its conduct at home and abroad.

Concern has also been expressed that North Korea could become defiant, or even implode, if rights became a focus. But a carefully developed strategy to incorporate human rights into talks could avoid the kind of collapse that could overwhelm the South with refugees and rehabilitation costs by seeking to gradually pry open North Korea's closed society. This would involve identifying the human rights issues where progress might be achievable and moving forward on those areas first.

Families separated by the Korean War and, more recently, by famine, extreme poverty or political persecution in the North could be a starting point. Although North Korea has allowed inter-Korean talks about family reunions, these have

produced only brief visits to the North for 1,600 of the 125,000 South Koreans who have applied. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which has expert tracing and reunification facilities and is present in Pyongyang, should be brought in to speed up responses to requests, especially from people over 70 for whom further delays could mean never seeing their families again.

Another achievable goal could be the liberation of the children and grandchildren of political prisoners in labor camps. Not only are North Koreans arbitrarily confined for "wrong thinking," "wrong knowledge" and "wrong doing," but up to three generations of their family members can be imprisoned as well. According to one camp escapee, because of this guilt by association, small children are forced to haul coal in underground mines and watch the executions of family members. Surely releasing them would pose no conceivable danger to North Korea's government, and this could serve as an entry point to longer-term discussions about the estimated 150,000 to 200,000 political prisoners held in brutal conditions.

Above all, the strategy should focus on securing greater access to North Korea. After years of negotiations, there has been progress on the humanitarian front. In 2008, for instance, Pyongyang agreed to allow greater access to relief workers bringing in food, to let them conduct inspections of food distribution with 24-hour notification and to permit Korean-speaking staff members. Though many of these concessions were withdrawn this year and need to be reinstated, a foundation was established.

Comparable efforts must be exerted to gain access for international human rights workers. For more than five years, North Korea has refused entry to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in North Korea, denied visits by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and barred the Red Cross from seeing prisoners or foreign citizens abducted to

the North. Nor has North Korea accepted the standards of the International Labor Organization so that the ILO can investigate labor camps and factories.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has not been able to screen North Koreans who have fled to China or monitor the plight of those forced back into North Korea. It is time for the U.S., together with U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, to mobilize a group of states with influence with North Korea to press for compliance with the goals and programs of the United Nations. A coherent plan would bring together all the disparate U.N. agencies and offices that seek human rights improvements in North Korea.

Finally, the creation of an organization for peace and security in northeast Asia should be a central aim of this new strategy, one that would expand the discussion among the six parties beyond strategic, economic and energy issues to include human rights and humanitarian concerns once multilateral talks resume. North Korea has already ratified the major international human rights agreements and might be more willing to face up to its international obligations within a regional framework from which it could gain political and economic benefits.

Former ambassador James Goodby, who helped set up the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, has argued, in a paper written while he was at the Brookings Institution, that a comparable framework for Asia could be "a much-needed agent for change" and help to hold governments accountable for the treatment of their people. With North Korean leader Kim Jong Il ailing and the future of the country uncertain, there may now be an opportunity to add human rights to the agenda.

Roberta Cohen is a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a board member of the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

Strive for nuclear disarmament

As Japan marks the 64th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world sees two forces working in opposite directions when it comes to the issue of nuclear weapons.

On one hand, the opportunity has arisen to strengthen moves toward the global elimination of nuclear weapons. In an April 5 speech in Prague, U.S. President Barack Obama touched on the steps although he hinted at inherent difficulties in taking this direction. On the other hand, the danger from nuclear proliferation is increasing, as exemplified by North Korea, which conducted its second nuclear-weapons test May 25.

In his speech, Mr. Obama made clear the U.S. commitment "to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." He also said that "as a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act" toward building a nuclear-free world.

Admitting that the goal will not be achieved quickly, Mr. Obama said "I'm not naive." He then emphasized that as long as nuclear weapons exist, the U.S. will retain an arsenal to deter any adversary and guarantee the defense of its allies. Despite these qualifying conditions, it is significant that the U.S. president has committed his administration to the dream of a world without nuclear weapons.

Mr. Obama said his administration will seek U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and negotiations on a new treaty to end the production of fissile materials used for producing nuclear weapons (the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty). The U.S. will also negotiate with Russia this year on a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

The U.S. ratification of the CTBT could have a positive effect. In fact, former United Nations chief weapons inspector Mr. Hans Blix recently said: "The reality is that if the U.S. were to ratify (CTBT), then China would. If China did, India would. If India did, Pakistan would. If Pakistan did, then Iran would. It would set in motion a positive domino effect."

As the only nation to have experienced atom bomb attacks and the horrors of nuclear devastation, Japan can provide impetus to the efforts that would eventually lead to creation of a nuclear-free world. It should not miss the chance to work together with the U.S. toward this goal.

On April 27, Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone delivered a speech titled "Conditions Toward Zero — 11 Benchmarks for

Global Nuclear Disarmament." In the speech, Mr. Nakasone announced a Japanese plan to host an international conference early next year to push global nuclear disarmament. Japan needs to prepare carefully for the conference, and it may need to coordinate the event with Washington as Mr. Obama has already disclosed a plan for the U.S. to host a Global Summit on Nuclear Security within the next year.

Mr. Nakasone also called on the nuclear weapons states to carry out "irreversible nuclear disarmament" — taking steps that include dismantling nuclear warheads, nuclear testing sites and facilities that produce fissile materials for nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapons states under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) — the U.S., Russia, Britain, China and France — should remember that the treaty requires them to carry out disarmament. Only when these nations show concrete moves toward this end will they acquire the moral leverage needed to persuade other nations to give up their nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons programs.

In May 2010, there will be a five-year review conference of the NPT to examine the status of nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The last review conference in May 2005 was a failure. The international community should strive to make the coming review conference successful. It also must work to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring nuclear weapons.

North Korea's second nuclear test on May 25, 2009 (its first one was Oct. 9, 2006) has raised tension in Northeast Asia. At this moment, Pyongyang has shown no signs of giving up its nuclear weapons programs. It also has refused to return to the six-party talks aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

This situation appears to have given rise to an opinion within Japan that favors softening Japan's three-point nonnuclear principle of neither "producing" nor "possessing" nuclear weapons and not allowing them to be "brought in." But such an about-face would only give a country like North Korea an excuse to further push its nuclear weapons programs.

Efforts to create a world free of nuclear weapons should not be left only to national governments. The city governments of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and civic organizations can make great contributions. If more and more people worldwide correctly understand the truly catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons, they surely will become a great force in pushing for nuclear disarmament.

My plan to achieve nuclear disarmament

Ban Ki Moon
New York

The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 marked an end and a beginning. The close of World War II ushered in a Cold War, with a precarious peace based on the threat of mutually assured destruction.

Today the world is at another turning point. The assumption that nuclear weapons are indispensable to keeping the peace is crumbling. Disarmament is back on the global agenda — and not a moment too soon. A groundswell of new international initiatives will soon emerge to move this agenda forward.

The Cold War's end, 20 years ago this autumn, was supposed to provide a peace dividend. Instead, we find ourselves still facing serious nuclear threats. Some stem from the persistence of more than 20,000 nuclear weapons and the contagious doctrine of nuclear deterrence. Others relate to nuclear tests — more than a dozen in the post-Cold War era, aggravated by the constant testing of long-range missiles. Still others arise from concerns that more countries or even terrorists might be seeking the bomb.

For decades, we believed that the terrible effects of nuclear weapons would be sufficient to prevent their use. The superpowers were likened to a pair of scorpions in a bottle, each knowing a first strike would be suicidal. Today's expanding nest of scorpions, however, means that no one is safe. The presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States — holders of the largest nuclear arsenals — recognize this. They have endorsed the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, most recently at their Moscow summit, and are seeking new reductions.

Many efforts are under way worldwide to achieve this goal. Earlier this year, the 65-member Conference on Disarmament — the forum that produces multilateral disarmament treaties — broke a deadlock and agreed to negotiations on a fissile material treaty. Other issues it will discuss include nuclear disarmament and security assurances for nonnuclear weapon states. In addition, Australia and Japan have launched a major international commission on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.

My own multimedia "WMD — We Must Disarm!" campaign, which will culminate on the International Day of Peace (Sept. 21), will reinforce growing calls for disarmament by former statesmen and grassroots campaigns, such as "Global Zero." These calls will get a further boost in September when civil society groups gather in Mexico City for a U.N.-sponsored conference on disarmament and development.

Though the United Nations has been working on disarmament since 1946, two treaties negotiated under U.N. auspices are now commanding the world's attention. Also in September, countries that have



signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) will meet at the U.N. to consider ways to promote its early entry into force. North Korea's nuclear tests, its missile launches and its threats of further provocation lend new urgency to this cause.

Next May, the U.N. will also host a major five-year review conference involving the parties to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which will examine the state of the treaty's "grand bargain" of disarmament, nonproliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. If the CTBT can enter into force, and if the NPT review conference makes progress, the world would be off to a good start on its journey to a world free of nuclear weapons.

My own five-point plan to achieve this goal begins with a call for the NPT parties to pursue negotiations in good faith — as required by the treaty — on nuclear disarmament, either through a new convention or through a series of mutually reinforcing instruments backed by a credible system of verification. Disarmament must be reliably verified.

Second, I urged the U.N. Security Council to consider other ways to strengthen security in the disarmament process, and to assure nonnuclear weapon states against nuclear weapons threats. I proposed to the council that it convene a summit on nuclear disarmament, and I urged non-NPT states to freeze their own weapon capabilities and make their own disarmament commitments. Disarmament must enhance security.

My third proposal relates to the rule of law. Universal membership in multilateral treaties is key, as are regional nuclear-weapon-free zones and a new treaty on fissile materials. President

Barack Obama's support for U.S. ratification of the CTBT is welcome — the treaty only needs a few more ratifications to enter into force. Disarmament must be rooted in legal obligations.

My fourth point addresses accountability and transparency. Countries with nuclear weapons should publish more information about what they are doing to fulfill their disarmament commitments. While most of these countries have revealed some details about their weapons programs, we still do not know how many nuclear weapons exist worldwide. The U.N. secretariat could serve as a repository for such data. Disarmament must be visible to the public.

Finally, I am urging progress in eliminating other weapons of mass destruction and limiting missiles, space weapons and conventional arms — all of which are needed for a nuclear weapons-free world. Disarmament must anticipate emerging dangers from other weapons.

This, then, is my plan to drop the bomb. Global security challenges are serious enough without the risks from nuclear weapons or their acquisition by additional states or non-state actors. Of course, strategic stability, trust among nations, and the settlement of regional conflicts would all help to advance the process of disarmament. Yet disarmament has its own contributions to make in serving these goals and should not be postponed.

It will restore hope for a more peaceful, secure and prosperous future. It deserves everybody's support.

Ban Ki Moon is U.N. secretary general.
© 2009 Project Syndicate
(www.project-syndicate.org)

Disaster in Afghanistan



DAVID
HOWELL

London

Thousands of troops from the United States, the United Kingdom and several other nations are struggling on in Afghanistan, with the Americans and British in particular suffering heavy casualties. But why are they there, and what are they trying to achieve?

Former U.S. President George W. Bush had no doubts on the matter. America (with its allies, or alone if necessary) was going into Afghanistan, he proclaimed, to hunt down Osama bin Laden and destroy al-Qaida.

But that was six years ago; since then the situation has become much more vague and confused — quite aside from the fact that bin Laden has never been found, if indeed he is still alive.

From hunting down terrorists the "mission" seems to have widened into all kinds of blurred objectives. One is to somehow defeat the local extremists, the Taliban, who threaten constantly to overrun large areas of the country and retake the control they once had.

Another is to support the installed government of President Hamid Karzai, despite the fact that this government is far from happy with the presence of foreign troops. A third is to halt the opium trade, despite the fact that the Karzai government is hand in glove with the narcotics barons who control it. So far this has proved a spectacular failure, with poppy growing for opium more widespread than ever.

A fourth objective is to protect human rights from the dismal standards of the Taliban, who treat women like slaves or worse and seem fond of executing people with minimal legal niceties. And a fifth is to rebuild the whole state in the democratic mold with decent facilities, education and health provision.

The idea that any or all of these objectives can be attained by battling with the Taliban day after day, and night after night, is proving as elusive today as it did for the British in the 19th century or the Russians in the last. The Afghan

people do not want foreign troops on their soil and will never rest or be "defeated" until the foreigners have been ejected, or give up and go away.

It is this hopeless muddle of aims that has led an important committee of the House of Commons at Westminster to deplore the lack of unified vision and strategy and call for a refocusing of priorities.

In fact the committee is saying nothing new because it has been obvious for a long while now to anybody familiar with the situation on the ground that the problems of Afghanistan cannot be solved by military means and that the lives of brave soldiers are being wasted by a policy aimed in completely the wrong direction. Perceptive personnel on the spot have

It should now be clear that "the West" can no longer act alone, can no longer throw troops and conventional armaments into complex and remote societies and cultures, where the concept of democracy means something quite different, and can no longer impose new government structures against local opposition.

long been saying that the real problem is the Karzai government itself. Little will ever be achieved if the government in Kabul is quietly undermining the efforts of the very forces that are supposed to be there to support it.

Some in the U.K. have argued that British military forces would suffer fewer casualties if they had better equipment, and particularly if they had more helicopters, thus avoiding perilous foot patrols along roads that have been heavily mined. But the real issue goes much deeper.

For one thing, it is doubtful whether many of the al-Qaida operatives are still in Afghanistan to be rooted out. It is more likely that they have long since moved their cells and training camps across the 1,600 km-long border into Pakistan, and into the unending valleys and mountain areas stretching from the Pamirs to Waziristan, which are beyond any central control and have proved the graveyard of countless expeditionary forces down the years.

Other al-Qaida units may well have moved further away to Somalia in the Horn of Africa, where new young terrorists can be trained up and the infiltrated with apparent ease into Western Europe, and especially the U.K., to plan new outrages and killings on the streets.

By that reckoning the U.S. and British forces are fighting the wrong war in the wrong country. But behind that lies an even deeper question. Should Western nations be intervening with military means in order to change governments and impose their values and democratic templates? And if so, how should they do that?

Global policing is obviously necessary to avoid world anarchy and instability. But it is surely high time that policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic, as well in all responsible nations including Japan and the rising Asian powers, conducted a robust re-examination of the doctrines of liberal interventionism and preemptive action that have led the Western powers into such quagmires of difficulty, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

It should now be clear that "the West" can no longer act alone, can no longer throw troops and conventional armaments into complex and remote societies and cultures, where the concept of democracy means something quite different, and can no longer impose new government structures against local opposition.

Advanced nations certainly have legitimate aims in wishing to protect themselves against terrorist extremism, destabilizing civil wars, massive human rights abuse on a genocidal scale and potential nuclear anarchy through proliferation.

These are the four new horsemen of the Apocalypse, the threats to every organized society. The strategic policymakers of the richer countries of the world need to learn to handle them with a good deal more skill and subtlety than they have shown over the past decade if their freedoms are to be preserved, their peoples defended and guarded, and their armies deployed to good effect, with clear aims, rather than being asked to achieve the impossible.

David Howell is a former British Cabinet minister and former chairman of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. He is now a member of the House of Lords.

Bill Clinton's unwise trip to North Korea

John R. Bolton
Washington
THE WASHINGTON POST

The Obama administration characterized former U.S. President Bill Clinton's unexpected visit to Pyongyang to secure the release of two American reporters, held unjustifiably by North Korea for nearly five months, as a private, humanitarian mission.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has insisted that the fate of the women who strayed into the North (whether accidentally or deliberately is still not clear), should be separated from the unresolved issue of the North's nuclear weapons program.

But North Korea has seen it very differently. Former President Clinton was met at Pyongyang's airport by notables led by Kim Kye Gwan, the North's longtime chief nuclear negotiator, an unmistakable symbol of linkage. In Pyongyang's view, the two reporters are pawns in the larger game of enhancing the regime's legitimacy and gaining direct access to important U.S. figures. The reporters' arrest, show trial and subsequent imprisonment (sentenced to 12 years hard labor) was hostage taking, essentially an act of state terrorism.

So the Clinton trip is a significant propaganda victory for North Korea, regardless of whether he carried an official message from Obama. Despite decades of bipartisan U.S. rhetoric about not negotiating with terrorists for the release of hostages, it seems that the Obama administration not only chose to negotiate, but to send a former president to do so.

While the United States is properly concerned whenever its citizens are abused or held hostage, efforts to protect them should not create greater risks for other Americans in the future. Yet that is exactly the consequence of visits by former presidents or other dignitaries as a form of

political ransom to obtain their release.

Iran and other autocracies are presumably closely watching the scenario in North Korea. With three American hikers freshly in Tehran's captivity, will Clinton be packing his bags again for another act of obeisance?

And, looking ahead, what American hostages will not be sufficiently important to merit the presidential treatment? What about Roxana Saberi and other Americans previously held in Tehran? What was it about them that

The reporters' arrest, show trial and subsequent imprisonment was hostage taking, essentially an act of state terrorism. Despite decades of bipartisan U.S. rhetoric about not negotiating with terrorists for the release of hostages, it seems that the Obama administration not only chose to negotiate, but to send a former president to do so.

made them unworthy of a presidential visit?

These are the consequences of poorly thought-out gesture politics, however well-intentioned or compassionately motivated. Indeed, the release of the two reporters — welcome news — doesn't mitigate the future risks entailed.

The Clinton visit may have many other negative effects. In some ways the trip is a flashback to the unfortunate 1994 journey of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who disrupted the Clinton administration's nuclear negotiations with North Korea and led directly to the misbegotten "Agreed Framework."

By supplying both political legitimacy

and tangible economic resources to Pyongyang, the Agreed Framework provided the North and other rogue states a road map for maximizing the benefits of illicit nuclear programs.

North Korea violated the framework almost from the outset but nonetheless enticed the Bush administration into negotiations (the six-party talks) to discuss yet again ending its nuclear program in exchange for even more political and economic benefits. This history is of the U.S. rewarding dangerous and unacceptable behavior, a lesson well learned by other would-be nuclear proliferators.

We cannot presently foretell whether or not Clinton's visit will lead to renewed negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program, but that appears to be the conclusion the Obama administration hopes to draw.

Ironically, both Kim and Obama may well want to kick-start bilateral negotiations, or, failing that, at least renew the six-party talks. Obama's "open hand" promise in his inaugural address isn't having much success around the world, and North Korea can always use new infusions of economic aid, which may well be the hidden cargo of the Clinton mission.

The point to be made on the Clinton visit is that the knee-jerk impulse for negotiations above all inevitably brings more costs than its advocates foresee. Negotiating from a position of strength, where the benefits to American interests will exceed the costs, is one thing. Negotiating merely for the sake of it, in the face of palpable recent failures, is something else indeed.

John R. Bolton, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, was U.S. ambassador to the United Nations from August 2005 to December 2006.

Myanmar exiles hand democracy plan over to U.N.

United Nations

AP

Exiled opposition leaders from Myanmar came together at the United Nations on Friday to present a plan for a democratic future in their homeland and ask the U.N. to transmit it to the country's military rulers.

The opposition leaders called for the release of Nobel Peace Prize-winning pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, a dialogue with the regime, credible elections in 2010 and a review of the constitution adopted last year.

The alliance of political parties and ethnic groups asked the U.N. Security Council and Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to send its reconciliation plan to the military regime in Myanmar, which was previously called Burma.

Suu Kyi is on trial for violating the terms of her house arrest after an uninvited American man swam to her lakeside home without permission in May, just before her detention was to end. Opposition leaders say the junta is using the incident to extend her detention ahead of next year's elections.

The charges against 64-year-old Suu Kyi, who has been detained for 14 of the last 20 years, have refocused international outrage on Myanmar, which has been ruled by its military since 1962. Suu Kyi's opposition party won national elections in 1990, but Myanmar's generals refused to relinquish power.

Sein Win, a cousin of Suu Kyi and head of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, which de-

scribes itself as the country's government-in-exile, called her trial a "mockery of justice." Myanmar used to be known as Burma.

He said the regime "has made a lot of promises, but if you look at the facts, it's not getting any better" as human rights are violated, villages are destroyed and the country becomes more militarized. He condemned the regime's purported nuclear ambitions.

In Myanmar on Friday, the regime said it arrested 15 people and accused foreign-based opposition groups and terrorists of plotting explosions during Ban's visit last month and trying to disrupt Suu Kyi's trial.

U.N. deputy spokeswoman Marie Okabe said she had no information on this aside from press reports.

Jeremy Woodrum, cofounder of the Washington-based U.S. Campaign for Burma, said it's significant that Myanmar's diverse political and ethnic groups joined in support of the reconciliation initiative.

He said the Security Council should focus on issues it has ignored, including the use of child soldiers, the rape of women from minority ethnic groups, forced labor and the destruction of villages.

The opposition's reconciliation program says the country faces a "constitutional crisis."

Woodrum called the constitution an "airtight" framework for ensuring the military continues to dominate all levers of power, no matter the outcome of any election. The military will appoint 25 percent of the seats in Parliament and can easily remove members who act independently, he said.

Pariahs of Asia and their nukes



GWYNNE
DYER

London

It is generally agreed that North Korea and Burma have the two most oppressive regimes in Asia. They rule over two of the poorest countries in the continent, and that is no coincidence whatever.

But there is one marked difference between them. No foreign leaders pay court to the Burmese generals in their weirdly grandiose new capital of Naypidaw (which makes even Brasilia seem cozy and intimate), whereas even Bill Clinton, the world's most recognizable celebrity statesman, makes the pilgrimage to Pyongyang.

Clinton was there to secure the release of two American journalists who were seized on the Chinese-North Korean border four months ago, probably with the explicit purpose of taking American hostages and forcing a high-level U.S. visit to the North Korean capital. That's why it was private citizen Bill, rather than his wife, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who made the visit to Kim Jong Il: The United States paid the Devil his due, but deniably.

The big difference is this: the Burmese regime is seen by most foreign governments as ugly but basically harmless (except to the Burmese people), whereas the North Korean regime is seen as ugly and extremely dangerous. And the most dangerous thing about North Korea is its nuclear weapons — so if the Burmese generals also want to have emissaries from the great powers genuflecting at their doorstep, they need some nuclear weapons too.

The notion of a nuclear-armed Burma is

faintly ridiculous, because the country has no foreign enemies that it needs to deter, let alone wants to attack. But respect matters too, especially to regimes (like the Burmese) that feel their legitimacy is always under question. Burmese nukes would elicit a whole lot of respect.

Articles published recently in the Sydney Morning Herald and the Bangkok Post by professor Desmond Ball of the Australian National University and by Thai-based Irish journalist Phil Thornton suggest that the Burmese military regime has sought North Korean help to build its own nuclear weapons. Specifically, it wants the North Koreans to create a plutonium reprocessing plant in caves near Naung Laing in northern Burma, not far from the site of a civilian nuclear reactor that is being built with Russian help.

So far, it sounds like the plot for a sequel to "Team America: World Police," but the usually reliable Web site Dictator Watch has been publishing warnings about the Burmese nuclear project for several years now. Most of the information comes from defectors, including a former army officer who studied nuclear engineering in Moscow for two years. A thousand others were being sent as well, he said.

In June the North Korean freighter Kang Nam 1, bound for Burma, turned back to port rather than accept inspection by U.S. warships under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874. That resolution was a response to North Korea's recent nuclear test, and requires governments to inspect ships coming from or going to North Korea if there are "reasonable grounds to believe" the vessel is carrying various categories of weapons including missile- and weapons of mass destruction-related cargoes.

Defectors often make stuff up to inflate their importance in the eyes of their new masters: Just think of the preposterous tripe that was peddled as "intelligence" by Iraqi defectors in the runup to the 2003 invasion. But at least three Burmese defectors have told essentially the same

tale about their country's nuclear weapons project, although they had no opportunity to coordinate their stories and did not even know one another.

Why would North Korea be doing it? Because it is being paid in "yellowcake" (partially refined uranium) which Burma processes at the Thabeik Kyin plant. And also because the fact that North Korea is a reckless nuclear weapons proliferator, willing to sell to anybody, makes it more dangerous, and being dangerous is what forces people like Bill and Hillary Clinton (and ultimately Barack Obama) to talk to it. All assuming that North Korea really is helping Burma to develop nuclear weapons, of course.

Ball and Thornton suggest that Burma could be processing 8 kg of plutonium-239 a year by 2014, after which it could produce one atomic bomb per year. Well, yes, but we all know that apparently competent intelligence agencies like the CIA and Mossad have been predicting that Iran will have nuclear weapons within five years practically every year since the early 1990s. They were wrong about Iran every year, and Iran is a much more serious country, in scientific, technological and industrial terms, than Burma.

But suppose it's true. Why would Burma be doing it? Not to nuke Thailand or Malaysia or Bangladesh, surely, for it has no serious quarrel with its neighbors. But one can imagine that Senior General Than Shwe and his colleagues would feel a good deal more secure if the U.S. and other great powers, instead of condemning and boycotting the Burmese dictatorship, were begging it to be responsible and give up its nuclear weapons.

Could it be as simple as that? Of course it could. That's why North Korea developed nuclear weapons, too.

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

North Korea's way of trying to break the ice



TOM
PLATE

Los Angeles

You will never get anything of significance done with North Korea unless you go right to the top. The essence of its political culture is a feral fusion of Asian family values ("father knows best") with rigid communist hierarchy.

At international conferences, midlevel North Korean operatives are usually too scared to negotiate anything other than the hotel bar bill. They fear deviating even one inch from the party line. That line — in tone and in content — is set by one to three or four big tunas in Pyongyang.

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton met with Pyongyang's biggest — if aging — tuna last week and got to leave with a prize: two jailed celebrity American journalists. Back in March they had been grabbed by North Korean border guards, taken back to the capital, charged and convicted of violating national-security law, and sentenced to a dozen years of hard labor.

From the Korean cultural perspective, therefore, the two lady journalists — Laura Ling and Euna Lee — became a very nice "gift" indeed that could be presented by Dear Leader Kim Jong Il to an appropriately co-equal American counterpart willing to trek up to the northern hermit kingdom to receive it.

Truth be told, the journalists in jail were of no use at all to the North Koreans. To put the matter crudely, they were nothing more than two more mouths to feed. The

decision to allow them to return home thus would have been made long before Clinton's clandestine trip to Pyongyang. It was just a question of the modalities and personalities of the handover.

No offense is intended to the two journalists (one, in fact, was a former college student of mine, and an inspiring one at that), but Clinton's trip was not primarily about them. It was mainly about the future of the U.S.-North Korean bilateral relationship.

The North Koreans, though not overly skilled in the charm-offensive department, have been looking for a way to resume talks leading to diplomatic normalization with the United States. But their odd manner of proceeding always seems to involve diplomatic insults and taking two steps back before taking another one forward — a difficult and indeed mathematically illogical way to establish forward progress.

As ever, the key would be for the top tier of the country to deal with the top tier of the U.S. As this column wrote in December, before the journalists' arrests, "In a few months, former U.S. president — Jimmy Carter or Bill Clinton — may be asked to travel to North Korea in pursuit of military denuclearization. This is the only way the deal will ever get done."

Sure, the North Koreans have a reputation for double-dealing — and, sometimes, for not dealing with a full deck of cards. But in another respect their behavior is rigidly logical and predictable: They like to deal their cards from the top of the deck.

What this means is that the release of Ling and Lee will not prove the end of the game but merely a preliminary. Having presented their gift to the American VIP, they now will wish for the Americans to continue the bilateral dialogue in return.

Recently the Obama administration reacted coldly to that idea, and indicated a preference for resuming the six-party talks hosted in Beijing by China. These talks appeared to produce a breakthrough several years ago before unraveling. Why? They violated the cardinal principle of not engendering true give-and-take negotiations at the highest level.

It makes more sense for the Obama administration to authorize Bill Clinton to return to Pyongyang. In truth, the former president feels he has major unfinished business there. Just before he left office more than eight years ago, he and his top people believed that a peace agreement with North Korea was a hair-length away. His successor scotched the deal and wanted no part of it. So the Obama administration can now go back to the future and let Clinton nail it all down.

It would be an unprecedented sight were Bill Clinton's wife to be included in the U.S. delegation, of course. But difficult times sometimes spawn peculiar arrangements. I would also lobby to have Japanese interests represented in Pyongyang too: Why not have former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi involved as well? He too visited Pyongyang and brought some hostages home.

As for vital South Korean interests, why not ask U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to participate? He is a former South Korean foreign minister.

The more the merrier; but unless there are only top people at the table in North Korea, nothing will get done. Surely everyone understands this by now?

Syndicated columnist and former university professor Tom Plate is writing a book on Lee Kuan Yew, the founder of modern Singapore.
© 2009 Pacific Perspectives Media Center

Global facade of security



WILLIAM
PFAFF

Paris

A once-fashionable subject in America's think tanks was futurology, supposed to be a fruitful method for foreseeing the future (or "possible futures" as it was put at the time).

It worked by projecting what were thought to be plausible developments in the situation of a given subject by way of a narrative that would lead to a series of "branching points," expected eventually to lead the analyst to unforeseen conclusions about what could happen.

Unexpected developments actually were fairly uncommon, since nearly everyone who played the game started with a bias toward one or another desirable outcome (or toward a particularly undesirable one that would demand immediate preventive measures to which the analyst had a professional or political commitment). If you were in favor of building missile defenses, your scenarios tended to run to future missile threats to the United States.

The second problem with the technique was that people are not really very imaginative, and the grip of conventional wisdom is hard to loosen. Ask people today about the geopolitical future and they nearly always will bring up a Chinese superpower threat, or a resurgent Russia threat, taking us back to the familiar terrain of the Cold War.

Rule out those two possibilities, and scenario-writers today generally will propose some kind of explosive increase in terrorist attacks. For example, one popular scenario is that al-Qaida seizes Pakistan's nuclear weapons and attacks America. Another, long popular among

neoconservatives, is that terrorist infiltrators incite the Muslim minorities in Western Europe to rise up, overthrow existing European governments, and establish a new Grand Caliphate incorporating all of Europe and Central and South Asia, with all their resources, and America is left beleaguered.

I don't know how many people in Washington take this last threat seriously, but there have been think-tank seminars to discuss the possibility, and books on the subject.

These and other commonly described future threats are ones that could badly damage the U.S. if they occurred, but rarely is a scenario offered with which an aroused America could not cope. This goes without much thought because of the automatic assumption that there is nothing with which the most powerful nation on Earth can't cope.

There assuredly is nothing that it cannot destroy. But destroying is not the same thing as coping. Let us consider the situation in Iraq, where there still are some 130,000 U.S. troops, most of them scheduled to withdraw over the next year and a half.

These days, a small but real possibility exists of an Israeli airstrike against Iran's nuclear facilities. One big reason Washington has opposed this is that an obvious Iranian riposte to what would be seen as an American-facilitated attack would be a ground assault on the U.S. forces in Iraq, and on those forces' logistic routes to Kuwait.

This would presumably be combined with operations in the Persian Gulf and its Arabian Sea approaches to deny these waters to naval operations meant to evacuate U.S. forces. The threat to conventional naval vessels of masses of fast, advanced-rocket-armed speedboats and Zodiacs has been widely discussed in naval circles, and the U.S. Navy has gamed the threat, reportedly with disquieting results.

Turning to the second American war currently under way, consider the

possibility that supporters of the Taliban arrange for the supply to them of modern ground-air missiles, just as the U.S. supplied such weapons to the anti-Russian mujahedeen during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. These could cripple helicopter and fighter-bomber air support for U.S. and NATO forces.

Suppose an unfriendly Russia then terminated its overflight agreement allowing American and NATO aircraft to supply allied forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan via Central Asian air routes. The Pakistan government simultaneously becomes so weakened by Taliban offensives, the activities of other Islamist forces, and Balochistan separatist unrest that the American forces' land communication routes to the south and east no longer function. They are in the same plight as the Americans trapped in Iraq.

Now all of this is perfectly normal futurology/war-gaming, and one can be sure that nothing I have suggested has failed to be foreseen and analyzed by military and naval staffs. But the overall conclusion that leaps up from the paper in this analysis is that the more wars you undertake abroad, the more places you intervene, and the more bases you build around the world, the less secure you are.

The Pentagon has been ringing the world with U.S. bases, meant to make the U.S. secure and able to strike down any threat to American interests, anywhere. There are currently more than 800 manned U.S. foreign military bases. Taken all together, they make up a formidable global array of power. But practically every one of them could be picked off by an appropriately sized hostile military operation.

Are they keeping America secure? I would argue that every one of them is an American vulnerability.

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

© 2009 Tribune Media Services

Seven topics for a summer day



HUGH
CORTAZZI

London

As Japanese lawmakers campaign for the Aug. 30 Lower House election, British members of Parliament are in recess and Prime Minister Gordon Brown is on holiday. Papers and weeklies are scraping the barrel for something to write about. Many fill their columns with so much sports that foreign readers might begin to think that British life revolves around football and cricket.

Perhaps we and the media should be giving more serious thought to the major challenges facing us as we approach the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Here are seven challenges to provide food for thought over the summer holidays:

- *The huge change in Europe's political structure since communism ended as a political force.* The symbol of this change was the fall of the Berlin Wall 20 years ago. Countries in Central Europe have joined the European Union, which itself has changed significantly. But much remains to be done in Europe to make certain that peace and prosperity can be maintained within a democratic framework.
- *Stabilization of relations between the EU and Russia.* The Russian autocracy is in a truculent mood. Russian supplies of oil and gas give it a strong hand, but Russia also needs the European market.
- *The challenge to Europe, America and the developed world from terrorism and militant elements of Islam.* The idea of an Islamic world caliphate is absurd; yet some young men and women are so indoctrinated that they are willing to destroy themselves, other innocent Muslims and followers of other religions in jihads against the West.

We may have made some progress in exposing the myths, but we have a long way to go before we can be confident that terrorism has been reduced to a containable nuisance.

Afghanistan is not the only source of terrorism. As Lord Malloch-Brown, who recently resigned from the government, reminded us, the threat of terrorism in Pakistan and Somalia is as great as, if not greater than, that from the Taliban in Afghanistan's Helmand province, where British forces have in the past month suffered the largest number of deaths and serious injuries in decades.

- *The unprecedented financial crisis of the past two years.* Unemployment in developed countries continues to grow. Bank lending has not yet recovered and demand remains weak. Some lessons seem to have been learned about the origins of the crisis, but few believe that the controls being refined are adequate enough yet to

prevent a financial relapse. We certainly have not eradicated the fundamental threat stemming from human greed.

- *The danger to our civilization from climate change.* Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was one of the first politicians to see it. For too long, wishful thinking and prejudice were allowed to dominate policymaking. Now, under President Barack Obama, it looks as though opinion in the United States is at last becoming more farsighted.

Still, the debate on what steps should be taken to deal with the growing threat of global warming often seems dominated by squabbles about who was responsible for past failures. Too little thought is given to finding solutions, which must include helping developing countries reduce their carbon emissions.

Demographic changes complicate the challenge from global warming. In developed countries, birthrates have fallen while life expectancy has grown dramatically as a result of improved living standards and advanced medical procedures. Populations in all developed countries are aging and, in some, already declining, thus placing increased burdens on working-age people.

Climate change will increase pressures to migrate to developed countries in temperate climatic zones. The extent to which immigration should be permitted is a highly charged political issue in many developed countries, but the pressures of those seeking asylum from corrupt and autocratic regimes or just seeking a better life free of the grinding poverty prevailing in the least developed countries will only grow.

Grants of development assistance are not just acts of charity; they serve real national interests. Governments in developed countries must persuade their electorates of the need to maintain and increase development assistance.

- *Ethical issues raised by medical and scientific breakthroughs, as in genome research.* How far should cloning research go? Another issue, which is quite topical in Britain now, is to what extent assistance should be lent to those wishing to end their lives because of pain and suffering.

- *Dangers of child pornography and fraud on the Internet, despite the immeasurable benefits to mankind from information technology such as faster and easier communication.*

Authoritarian regimes such as China's and Iran's have tried to impose restrictions and censorship, fortunately, with only partial success.

Tackling these seven major challenges requires intelligent dialogue that can be successfully developed only among an intelligent and well-informed electorate. This in turn depends on improving our educational systems where weaknesses are only too apparent.

Hugh Cortazzi, a former British diplomat, served as ambassador to Japan (1980-1984).

Breakthrough with North Korea?

The release by North Korea of two Korean-American journalists is a welcome event. The two women broke the law, but incarceration was excessive punishment and their release was long overdue. The delay suggests the fate of these two women was determined by forces much larger than the details of their particular "crimes." The key question now is what comes next: Is this gesture part of a larger strategy by Pyongyang to re-engage the world, and the United States, in particular, and how will Washington and other nations respond?

Ms. Laura Ling and Ms. Euna Lee were arrested earlier this year when they crossed into North Korea from China as they reported on the fate of North Korean refugees. After a brief trial, they were convicted and sentenced to 12 years of labor, but they remained in a state guest house rather than being sent to prison. That alone suggests that North Korea planned all along to release the two women when circumstances were right.

Washington reportedly began back-channel discussions with Pyongyang to win their release immediately after they were detained. The arduous process was made immeasurably more difficult by North Korea's nuclear and missile tests, its withdrawal from multilateral denuclearization talks, United Nations sanctions, and injudicious remarks about the North Korean legal system and North Korea by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Add reports of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's ill health and efforts to secure the succession of his son and it is a wonder that the women were ever released.

Hints that Pyongyang might be ready to deal surfaced in late July when North Korea announced that it was prepared to talk to the U.S. "about the current situation." Messages were sent to the U.S. indicating that the right envoy would be given a visa, and the North suggested that former U.S. President Bill Clinton would fit the bill. He went, met Mr. Kim, and returned with the women.

The identification of Mr. Clinton as the right envoy is interesting and ironic. The only other former U.S. president to visit Pyongyang was Mr. Jimmy Carter, whose intervention defused the first U.S.-North Korea nuclear crisis in 1994 — reportedly much to the consternation of the Clinton administration. Washington and Pyongyang then agreed on a nuclear pact that froze the North's nuclear program as well as a missile moratorium. Then Secretary of State Madeline Albright visited Pyongyang, making her the highest-ranking U.S. official to make that trip, a gesture that was reciprocated by the visit of Gen. Jo Myong Rok to Washington in

1999. As he left office, Mr. Clinton was contemplating a visit to Pyongyang himself, but it never materialized.

The symbolism of Mr. Clinton's visit is two fold, and targets two different audiences. The first signal is to the Obama administration and the message is that Pyongyang is ready to do business and the relationship of the Clinton years — the high point of U.S.-North Korea relations — is possible. Also, rumors of Mr. Kim's ill health are exaggerated and he is in charge. The second message is for North Korean audiences. It draws a parallel between Mr. Clinton's visit and that of Mr. Carter: It cloaks Mr. Kim in his father's legacy, showing that he too commands international attention and that, like the Great Leader, only he can navigate the country through difficult diplomatic waters.

How will the U.S. respond? Thus far, the administration insists that there has been no change in its policy. The release of the women and North Korea's nuclear programs are separate issues. Washington demands that Pyongyang return to the six-party talks and honor pledges it made in that forum to completely eliminate its nuclear weapons program and give up its nuclear arms. Meanwhile, North Korea has said that it will not return to the six-party talks, that it will not give up its nuclear weapons until the U.S. abandons its "hostile party" — whatever that means — and it is only prepared to talk to Washington bilaterally. Looking at the two positions, it is hard to see common ground.

Humanitarian or not, we expect Mr. Clinton made the case for North Korea to return to negotiations and to change its behavior. We hope the U.S. is telling the truth when it says that Mr. Clinton's visit was private, that he made no deals, and that the U.S. remains committed to the six-party process and its goals. Resolution of the North Korean situation depends on the other five parties to the talks speaking to Pyongyang with one voice and insisting that it honor its promises. Maintaining that united front requires trust among the five. That asset had been dwindling, especially between Washington and Tokyo and Seoul. It also requires a common understanding of the situation — an understanding that becomes more difficult when Pyongyang demonstrates flexibility.

Some will look to the Clinton visit for ways Japan can handle its problems with North Korea, in particular the fate of the abductees. But the parallels are inexact at best, misleading at worst. The most important lesson is to keep focused on the big goal — North Korea's denuclearization. While keeping priorities straight, Japan should do its utmost to find ways to solve the abduction issue.

Iran's nuclear aims threaten world

Dore Gold
Jerusalem
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Defying history and logic, the idea that the West should diplomatically engage with Iran still commands an important following. Despite the massive waves of demonstrators across Iran who charged their government with rigging the June 12 presidential elections, there still are officials in the Obama administration who seem to believe that engagement with the Islamic Republic should "remain on the table," as columnist Roger Cohen put it in *The New York Times Magazine* this week.

Javier Solana, the European Union foreign policy chief, agrees: "We would like very much that soon we will have the possibility to restart multilateral talks with Iran on the important nuclear issues," he said June 24.

But they're wrong, just as they have been from the start. Indeed, there are plenty of reasons to be skeptical about sticking to engagement. The main one is that it has already been tried — and utterly failed. Iran has consistently used the West's willingness to engage as a delaying tactic, a smoke screen behind which Iran's nuclear program has continued undeterred and, in many cases, undetected.

Back in 2005, Hassan Rowhani, the former chief nuclear negotiator of Iran during the reformist presidency of Mohammad Khatami, made a stunning confession in an internal briefing in Tehran, just as he was leaving his post. He explained that in the period during which he sat across from European negotiators discussing Iran's uranium enrichment ambitions, Iran quietly managed to complete the critical second stage of uranium fuel production: its uranium conversion plant in Isfahan. He boasted that the day Iran started its negotiations in 2003 "there was no such thing as the Isfahan project." Now, he said, it was complete.

Rowhani's revelation showed clearly

how Iran exploited the West's engagement. Moreover, the Iranians violated their 2004 agreement with the EU and brilliantly dragged out further negotiations that followed. Equally important, they delayed Western punitive moves against them, keeping the U.N. Security Council at bay for years.

Mohammed Javad Larijani, a former deputy foreign minister and brother to Rowhani's successor as chief negotiator, admitted the logic of diplomatic engagement from the Iranian side: "Diplomacy must be used to lessen pressure on Iran for its nuclear program."

Advocates of engagement with Iran often use an unfair argument to advance their case: Their cause, they claim, is opposed mainly by Israel, which is pushing its own narrow agenda. True, Israel is a target of Iran, whose leadership calls for the "elimination of Israel from the region" — to quote supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who said this years before President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. So that there would be no confusion about Iranian intent, Khamenei's words were hung from a Shahab 3 missile in a 2003 military parade.

But Israel is not Iran's only target. If that were the case, the Iranians would have had no reason to develop missiles that fly well past Israeli territory to Central Europe and beyond.

In fact, the greatest engagement skeptics today are the leaders of the Sunni Arab states from Morocco to Bahrain. The Persian Gulf states, in particular, have repeatedly been the targets of Iranian subversion operations. Bahrain was called the 14th province of Iran earlier in 2009 by one of Khamenei's key advisers. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have been attacked by Iranian-backed Hezbollah operatives in the past. Iran still occupies islands belonging to the United Arab Emirates, close to the oil tanker routes in the Strait of Hormuz.

And Egypt just cracked a large Iranian-supported Hezbollah cell that was planning attacks on key economic centers in the Egyptian state. For these

reasons, Arab officials don't need prompting from Israel. Their common fear is that a nuclear Iran will embolden groups such as Hezbollah, which will feel it enjoys a nuclear sponsor protecting it from any retaliatory action. Unlike their Western counterparts, these Arab officials are savvy enough to distinguish between status quo states that just want to assure the security of their borders and ideologically driven revolutionary powers like Iran with expansive aims.

An Iran with hegemonistic aspirations will not be talked out of acquiring nuclear weapons through a new Western incentives package. Only the most severe economic measures aimed at Iran's dependence on imported gasoline, backed with the threat of Western military power, might pull the Iranians back at the last minute. Until now, U.N. sanctions on Iran have been too weak to have any real effect.

It is critical to understand that an Iran that crosses the nuclear threshold after repeated warnings that doing so is "unacceptable" would be even less likely to be deterred in the future. It would provide global terrorism the kind of protective umbrella that al-Qaida never had back on 9/11, including Hezbollah cells located at present in Central Europe and Latin America. Some Arab states, like Qatar, have already been largely "Finlandized," to borrow a Cold War term for states that make their foreign policy subservient to the wishes of a powerful neighbor. But as Iran's nuclear program continues unopposed, more Arab states will follow, changing the Middle East entirely.

Halting the Iranian nuclear program is a global imperative; acquiescing to a nuclear Iran in the hope that it will pragmatically understand the limits of its own power would be a colossal mistake.

Dore Gold served as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations from 1997 to 1999. His book "The Rise of Nuclear Iran: How Tehran Defies the West" will be published in September.

The right time to pull out of Iraq

Barbara F. Walter
San Diego
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Over the next 2½ years, the United States is scheduled to withdraw all of its troops from Iraq. Americans, for the most part, are elated. The war in Iraq has been longer and costlier than almost anyone expected, and continued involvement seems unnecessary in the wake of the seemingly successful "surge." Iraqis — at least the Iraqi government and many Shiites — are also delighted. The withdrawal of American forces means the removal of a large occupying army, and with that, the chance to govern themselves. If the transition goes smoothly, everyone wins.

On the surface, this optimism seems justified. The Iraqi civil war that reached its peak in 2006 appears almost over. Violence is down. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his Dawa Party are gaining in popularity, and al-Qaida's influence in the country has been marginalized. The Iraq of today is remarkably different from the Iraq of three years ago. Below the surface, however, is a different story.

Over the last 15 years, scholars have collected and analyzed data on the 125 or so civil wars that have taken place around the world since 1940. Two findings suggest that the outlook for Iraq is significantly more pessimistic than policymakers in the U.S. or Iraq would hope.

The first is what academics Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis call the conflict trap. A country that has experienced one civil war is much more likely to experience a second and third civil war.

That's partly because violence tends to exacerbate the political, economic and social problems that caused war to break out in the first place. But it is also because the first civil war often ends with no clear victor and no enforceable peace settlement. As soon as the combatants have rested and resupplied, strong incentives exist to try to recapture the state.

This was the case, for example, in Angola during the 1980s and 1990s, when numerous peace settlements were

attempted but never implemented. It was also the case more recently in Sudan, Colombia and Sri Lanka, where combatants returned to war even after fairly lengthy periods of peace.

The second finding is what I call the settlement dilemma. Combatants who end their civil war in a compromise settlement — such as the agreement to share power in Iraq — almost always return to war unless a third party is there to help them enforce the terms.

That's because agreements leave combatants, especially weaker combatants, vulnerable to exploitation once they disarm, demobilize and prepare for peace. In the absence of third-party enforcement, the weaker side is better off trying to fight for full control of the state now, rather than accepting an agreement that would leave it open to abuse in the future.

Iraq today faces both of these problems. No one group has been able to win a decisive military victory, even though violence is down from the high of 2006. Shiite groups continue to compete for power and influence, conflict continues among the Kurds and various factions over valuable oil fields in the north, and al-Qaida remains ready to realign with the Sunnis should the opportunity arise. American soldiers have kept a lid on internecine fighting. But the recent increase in violence in some of Iraq's cities reveals that different groups began jockeying for position as U.S. troops left the cities in the hands of Iraqi security forces in June and in anticipation of complete U.S. withdrawal.

Right now, U.S. forces serve two important purposes. First, they signal to al-Maliki and the dominant Shiite population that a decisive victory over the Sunnis and Kurds will not be possible. They also signal to the less-numerous Sunni and Kurdish populations that both of these groups will be protected from Shiite exploitation over time. Remove U.S. forces and U.S. involvement in Iraq and you simultaneously embolden the Shiites while telling the weaker groups they must fend for themselves.

So what should the U.S. do? U.S. President Barack Obama has already

said he plans to remove all combat troops by August 2010, with a remaining force of 35,000 to 50,000 "support troops" in place until the end of 2011. There is pressure to pull out all the troops on a faster schedule, but there is also talk of slowing the timetable for the removal of combat troops.

The U.S. needs to decide what outcome it is willing to live with in Iraq. It's likely that if the U.S. withdraws all of its troops on schedule, the strategic balance will dramatically shift in favor of the Shiites, and they will press for full control over the state. This, in turn, will probably goad the Sunnis and Kurds back to war, likely ending in a brutal Shiite victory and the establishment of an authoritarian state.

If the U.S. wants to avert this scenario, it will need to create real incentives for al-Maliki and the Shiites to offer a fair deal that transfers real political power to the Sunnis and Kurds by the 2011 deadline, and then it needs to help them enforce it over time. This would require that those 50,000 "support troops" remain in Iraq until the new political institutions are firmly established, something most experts believe will take an additional five to 10 years.

One of the most robust findings in the civil war literature is the importance of active peacekeepers in helping to implement compromise settlements. Between 1940 and 2002, if peacekeepers were present on the ground, settlements were implemented and civil wars ended. If peacekeepers were not present, they were not.

Peace in Iraq is possible. But the U.S. shouldn't fool itself into believing that it can get peace and stability in Iraq without committing significant military and nonmilitary resources to Iraq well beyond 2011.

Barbara Walter is professor of political science at the School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at the University of California, San Diego. She is the author of "Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars" and the forthcoming "Reputation and Civil War: Why Separatist Conflicts Are So Violent."

A mockery in Myanmar

To the surprise of very few, a court in Myanmar has found Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi guilty of violating internal security laws and given a three-year prison term. As a theatrical coda to the ruling, the military regime immediately cut the sentence to 18 months of house arrest — to demonstrate its humanitarian impulses. The world must condemn this transparent attempt to sideline the most potent popular political force in Myanmar and governments must take active measures to punish those responsible.

This farce began in early May, when an American visitor, Mr. John Yettaw, swam across a lake behind Mrs. Suu Kyi's home and forced his way into her villa, claiming that God had told him she was going to be assassinated by terrorists. Mr. Yettaw, a veteran of the Vietnam war who is said to suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, had tried to visit Ms. Suu Kyi the previous November but was turned away at the door. This time he pled exhaustion and was permitted to sleep in the house for two days.

For that act of kindness, Ms. Suu Kyi and two women who work for her were arrested and tried for violating the terms of her house arrest and breaking a security law protecting the state from "subversive elements." Mr. Yettaw, meanwhile, was sentenced to seven years of hard labor and imprisonment.

There are plenty of reasons to be suspicious about these events. Ms. Suu Kyi's house arrest for the past six years was in itself a violation of Myanmar's laws, which limit such detention to five years. A court was to rule on her status at the end of May when Mr. Yettaw showed up. Strangely, although Ms. Suu Kyi had alerted the authorities about Mr. Yettaw's attempt to visit her the previous year, he was given another visa to visit the country.

The outcome of the trial was never in doubt. Myanmar is following its "road map to democracy," a process that is supposed to end the military junta's rule that began in 1990 when it overruled an election won by the National League of Democracy (NLD), headed by Ms. Suu Kyi. In response to international pressure — tepid, but constant — the junta agreed to give up power, but the process has been stage-managed and looks like a transition in name more than reality. NLD leaders have been imprisoned or exiled. Ms. Suu Kyi has spent 14 of the last 19 years under house arrest. NLD rallies are suppressed, their supporters harassed and jailed. That makes a mockery of the election scheduled to be held next year. In fact, it is fair to ask what the point is of a ballot that reserves a quarter of parliamentary seats for the military.

So, the court's finding that Ms. Suu Kyi and her assistants were guilty was a foregone conclusion. The intervention of Home Minister Maj. Gen. Muang Oo, who announced minutes after the ruling was read that the sentence was being cut in half — because the defendant was the daughter of the country's independence hero and because of the "the need to preserve community peace and tranquillity and prevent any disturbances in the road map to democracy" — was dramatic, most particularly in the sense that it was scripted.

Ms. Suu Kyi announced she would appeal the ruling. Other governments denounced the ruling. Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone said the ruling is extremely disappointing and that Ms. Suu Kyi's current conditions are extremely regrettable. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, who was unable to meet the defendant on a recent visit to Myanmar, "deplored" the ruling. The U.N. Security Council will convene a closed-door emergency session Thursday to discuss the situation. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the trial should never have been held and called for the release of all political prisoners. The European Union said it will adopt additional sanctions that target "those responsible for the ruling" as well as the entire regime.

But since those governments have limited influence over the junta in Myanmar, the most important reaction is that of Southeast Asian nations. The decision to reduce the sentence was intended to send a message to them, to signal that Myanmar is sensitive to international opinion and to lessen their opposition to the trial. Singapore said it was "disappointed" by the ruling while the Philippines called the decision "incomprehensible and deplorable." That does not mean that either government, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to which they belong, along with Myanmar, will take concrete actions to express their displeasure and press the junta to change course.

Instead, ASEAN governments are likely to continue to shelter behind the "noninterference principle" that guides ASEAN members, even though the Myanmar government's actions make a mockery of the group's commitments to democracy and human rights. They are also fearful of China further extending its influence into Myanmar. But ASEAN has shown that it has no influence over developments in the country. Only a united front among all nations that demands that the junta respect its own declared goals will bring about change and undo the latest miscarriage of justice in Myanmar.

Conviction of Suu Kyi ends hopes for more sensitive Myanmar junta

ANALYSIS

Tim Johnston
Bangkok
THE WASHINGTON POST

The decision by the generals who run Myanmar to extend Aung San Suu Kyi's incarceration by 18 months has abruptly snuffed out the dim hope that the regime was becoming more sensitive to international pressure for democratic reform.

The verdict was widely expected: Governments and international rights organizations came out with prepared condemnations only minutes after it was announced.

But it has illustrated the West's inability to change the direction of the Myanmar government and the paucity of its arsenal when it comes to punishing repressive regimes.

In a short closing statement at her trial, Suu Kyi said that such a verdict would condemn the authorities as much as her and her companions.

"The court will pronounce on the innocence or guilt of a few individuals. The verdict itself will constitute a judgment on the whole of the law, justice and constitutionalism in our country," she said.

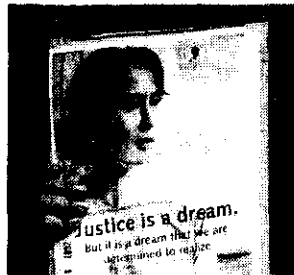
Before Suu Kyi's arrest, there was growing international support for the idea that isolating the regime with sanctions had failed to persuade the generals to improve democratic freedom or human rights, and that some form of diplomatic and commercial re-engagement might be more effective.

However, Tuesday's verdict appeared likely to give new ammunition to the highly vocal international prosanctions lobby, making it harder for governments to explore a more nuanced approach.

At the same time, the international community also is likely to find it difficult to toughen its stance.

"If you look at economic sanctions, our leverage is minimal. There is nothing exciting in our back pocket," said one European diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Analysts say the ruling junta was determined to use the case to keep Suu Kyi — still the generals' most formidable opponent despite having spent 14 of the past 19 years under house arrest — out of circulation ahead of elections scheduled for next year, even though the constitution writ-



Just a dream: An activist holds a poster of Myanmar prodemocracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Bangkok in 2007. REUTERS

ten by the regime guarantees the military 25 percent of the seats in the new Parliament.

Suu Kyi's supporters in her National League for Democracy say that although her freedom would be vital for a free and fair ballot, it would not be enough in itself, given the constitutional guarantee of a quarter of parliamentary seats for the military. The fact that the international community used every measure and threat in its arsenal and still failed to influence the outcome of the trial gives little hope to those who are looking for overseas pressure to help get the constitution amended.

There was a surreal quality to the performance in Myanmar. The fact that the court was trying to ascertain her guilt when she was the victim of a break-in at her compound was only the icing on a cake that might have been baked by Franz Kafka.

The beginning of the case was bizarre enough. On May 5, police arrested John William Yettaw, a 54-year-old American veteran of the Vietnam War, as he was using homemade flippers and an empty plastic water bottle to swim across the lake that backs onto the dilapidated villa where Suu Kyi has been held.

Yettaw had tried to visit her before, last November, and succeeded in reaching the house, but she had refused to see him and informed the authorities once he had left.

The fact that he had been given another visa to visit the country spawned conspiracy

theories suggesting that the junta had arranged the visit to create a case against her, although Suu Kyi's more sober supporters came to the conclusion that Yettaw was probably too much of a loose cannon for even the Myanmar authorities.

Even if the government was not behind the visit, it offered an opportunity to undermine Suu Kyi's status as possibly the world's most famous prisoner of conscience by trying her on criminal charges in courts that have long done the government's bidding.

She was moved to Yangon's Insein prison pending trial. The international reaction was instant. U.S. President Barack Obama called the charges spurious and said she should be released; European powers threatened to widen sanctions against the regime; even China, one of the regime's few remaining allies, signed a regional statement calling on Myanmar to release political prisoners.

Authorities responded by making sure the case had all the trimmings of due legal process: judges, defense attorneys and a system of appeal when the judges barred some of the defense witnesses.

They even allowed diplomats and the media to attend the trial intermittently.

But there was a surreal quality to the performance. The fact that the court was trying to ascertain her guilt when she was the victim of a break-in at her compound was only the icing on a cake that might have been baked by Franz Kafka.

When U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon visited Myanmar, which is also called Burma, he was denied permission to see Suu Kyi on the grounds that the government did not want to be seen to be interfering with the judicial process.

The defense argued that since the government originally took Suu Kyi into "protective custody" after a drunken government mob attacked her convoy, it was the guards surrounding the compound who should have been in the dock. The defense told the court that she had neither invited nor welcomed the intrusion, and they pointed out that the law under which she was being charged was part of a constitution that the generals themselves had repealed.

But in the end, for the courts in Yangon, legalities mattered less than political expediency.

Fatah vote raises fresh peace hopes

Israeli doubts, Hamas hold on Gaza likely to slow progress

ANALYSIS

Bethlehem West Bank
AP

Fatah has elected a rejuvenated leadership that will likely bring the mainstream Palestinian movement more in line with U.S. President Barack Obama's vision for an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement, according to unofficial results released Tuesday.

But a reluctant Israel and militant Islamic Hamas stranglehold on the Gaza Strip pose formidable obstacles on the road toward a peace accord.

The voting for Fatah's two main decision making bodies, the Central Committee and the larger Revolutionary Council, was the highlight of the first convention held in two decades by the movement founded by the late Yasser Arafat. The meeting was scheduled for three days but has stretched into its eighth because of acrimonious wrangling.

Official results have not yet been released, but the vote appeared to present a new Fatah leadership that removed some of the old-time exiled revolutionaries who urged armed struggle in favor of pragmatic, younger grassroots activists who grew up in the West Bank and Gaza and support negotiating a peace treaty with Israel.

The new faces on the Fatah leadership bodies are not newcomers to the scene. Instead, most are grassroots activists who have long clamored for a voice in Palestinian policymaking. Their ascendancy gives a boost to prospects for a Mideast



Marwan Barghouti

breakthrough, giving the mainstream, secular Fatah more credibility among Palestinians who threw their traditional Fatah leaders out of power in 2006 elections, tired of corruption, nepotism and inefficiency — and especially their failure to win independence despite decades of armed struggle and years of peace talks.

Lurking in the background are Israel and Hamas, sworn enemies of each other and suspicious of Fatah.

Hamas overran the Gaza Strip in 2007, seizing power after 18 months of frustration over Fatah's refusal to relinquish control despite the Hamas sweep of the 2006 elections. Reconciliation talks have failed to heal the Fatah-Hamas rift, and it is assumed there can be no peace accord until the West Bank and Gaza are reunited under a single government.

Israel has been watching the convention with skepticism. Officials have denounced its endorsement of the principle of armed struggle, though the delegates voted to favor measures such as boycotts.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu takes a hard line toward the Pal-

estinians. Obama wrung from Netanyahu a reluctant endorsement of a Palestinian state, but for decades he has backed Israeli control over the West Bank for security reasons.

In all, 14 of the Central Committee's 18 elected seats went to new members. The final results, along with the results of the vote for the 80 elected seats of Fatah's 120-seat Revolutionary Council were expected Wednesday. Abbas remains Fatah's chairman.

Although the younger leaders endorse creation of a Palestinian state next to Israel, they have not offered far-reaching concessions.

Most prominent among the newly elected leaders is Marwan Barghouti, a charismatic, homegrown leader who was the West Bank Fatah commander when he was arrested by Israeli forces in 2001. Convicted of involvement in several fatal Palestinian attacks, Barghouti was sentenced to five consecutive life terms in an Israeli prison.

Before the eruption of a Palestinian uprising in 2000, Barghouti met regularly with Israeli peace activists and expressed readiness for compromise. After the violence erupted, however, he adopted an increasingly tough line toward Israel, mirroring other disillusioned Palestinian moderates.

In recent comments, Barghouti has rejected the resumption of peace talks with Israel unless it first halts all construction in its West Bank settlements, pledges to free all prisoners and agrees to withdraw from all of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem — items Israel believes should be the heart of negotiations.

"This election is setting a new future for the movement, a new democratic era," said Mohammed Dahlan, 47, a former Gaza security chief who was one of the winners, according to the unofficial results.

EDITORIAL Burma must come clean

Published: 5/08/2009 at 12:00 AM

Newspaper section: News

The evidence is now overwhelming of an alliance between Burma and North Korea. The vital question for Thailand is whether whatever ventures the two rogue states have started up pose a threat to our neighbourhood. In one sense, the answer is a clear "yes", since secrecy breeds suspicion. But as this newspaper showed in three major reports last Sunday, the Burma-North Korea alliance vastly increases the stakes of international diplomacy in our backyard and in the rest of Southeast Asia.

Any project involving nuclear weapons paints a new bull's-eye over the region, not to mention that Burma would be in gross and unforgivable violation of the Asean agreements it has signed.

First, the known facts.

Burma, with experts from North Korea, has undertaken huge earthworks in areas where foreigners and most Burmese are not allowed. Truck-sized tunnels have been burrowed into the ground and hills in the general region of the heavily secured new capital, Naypyidaw, in remote central Burma.

Commercial satellite photos show more than 600 tunnel complexes. Other photographs, taken on the ground and smuggled out of the country, show that some of the tunnels are fortified with blast-proof doors.

During construction of these tunnels, which was begun by 2003, Burma renewed official relations with North Korea, cut off in 1983 after state-sponsored terrorists from Pyongyang attempted to assassinate South Korean president Chun Doo-hwan in Rangoon with three deadly bombs.

Relations resumed in April, 2007. At the time, the chief concern of Burma's neighbours and the United Nations was that the twin rogue states would collude against human rights, chiefly with Burma purchasing weapons from North Korea.

The Burmese military continues to abuse citizens at the whim or acquiescence of the ruling junta. But the tunnel projects and increasingly warm relations between Burma and North Korea raise major questions that get to the very basis of Southeast Asian diplomacy, cooperation and peace.

Burma and its dictatorship have clearly violated major tenets of Asean. Indeed, as details of the tunnel projects emerged to the public, Burmese officials were attending the Asean Regional Forum in the southern Thai resort island of Phuket. The purpose of the ARF is specifically to encourage openness among all members in order to build trust.

Even the most peaceful and innocent nuclear project requires Burma - by Asean and by United Nations law - to fully reveal the work. It must be remembered that the junta has stated that it wants a small nuclear reactor, such as the one in Bangkok. Russia announced it would help to achieve that aim; then the subject was dropped from public discussion. But even that proposal must be fully public, and conducted through the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency.

There also has been speculation that the tunnels are part of a plan to mine uranium, and again Burma would be breaking international law not to discuss that. On general principles of regional agreement, Burma must quickly disclose what it is up to with the tunnel complexes. The generals can prove that reports of nuclear cooperation with North Korea are wrong. But by their silence they also can encourage even more distrust and suspicion about the intentions of their violent regime.

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

10,000 defy Malaysia police, protest detention law

The Associated Press , Kuala Lumpur | Sat, 08/01/2009 2:36 PM | World

Riot police fired tear gas in a clash with at least 10,000 opposition supporters who marched in Malaysia's main city Saturday to protest a law allowing detention without trial.

The rally in Kuala Lumpur was intended to pressure the government to scrap the Internal Security Act, which provides for indefinite imprisonment of people regarded as security threats.

Thousands of people gathered at the city's main mosque and a shopping mall in defiance of government warnings that police would crack down on demonstrators.

Police fired tear gas and chemical-laced water to disperse the protesters shortly after they began marching toward the national palace. The protesters - who chanted "Reformasi," the opposition's slogan for political change - had planned to submit a petition to the country's king, the constitutional monarch, to denounce the security act.

Witnesses saw police charging with batons at the protesters and scuffling with them. Many people ran into alleys and shops nearby to avoid being arrested.

Before the march started, Kuala Lumpur Police Chief Muhammad Sabtu Osman said 150 people - identified as protesters because they were wearing opposition T-shirts and headbands - had been detained to prevent them from taking part.

Government authorities had warned they would not allow the protest, saying it could undermine public peace.

Authorities had set up roadblocks across Kuala Lumpur to deter the demonstrators from trying to reach the city center, sparking massive traffic crawls. Hundreds of riot police backed by trucks mounted with water cannons stood outside train stations and shopping malls where the demonstrators had arranged to gather.

Restaurants and stores were shuttered on several streets amid concerns of violence.

Prime Minister Najib Razak on Friday urged people not to join the protest. Najib has promised to consider amending the security act, though government officials have repeatedly said it is necessary to safeguard national security.

Human rights groups estimate at least 17 people are being held under the act, mainly for alleged links to militants and document forgery.

Human rights activists have long decried the decades-old act, instituted during the British colonial era, saying it is sometimes used to jail government critics and dampen dissent.

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/01/10000-defy-malaysia-police-protest-detention-law.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Key nations back release of Myanmar's Suu Kyi

The Associated Press , United Nations | Thu, 08/06/2009 7:02 AM | World

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon won support Wednesday from key nations for his appeal to Myanmar's government to free detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and release all political prisoners - and he said he expects a positive response from the country's military rulers.

The U.N. chief told reporters after chairing a closed-door meeting of the Group of Friends on Myanmar that he was pleased at their support which he said confirmed the international community's desire for Myanmar to respond positively "to our concerns, expectations and encouragements."

The Group of Friends includes about 15 countries - Myanmar's neighbors, interested Asian and European nations, and the five permanent U.N. Security Council members, the U.S., Russia, China, Britain and France.

Ban said he told the group that he reiterated to Myanmar's U.N. ambassador on July 31 his expectation and that of the international community that careful consideration be given to the implications of the verdict in Suu Kyi's trial, which could come on Aug. 11, and to "use this opportunity to exercise its responsibility to ensure her immediate release."

Suu Kyi is charged with violating the terms of her house arrest when an American intruder swam across a lake and spent two nights at her home in early May. She faces up to five years in prison and is widely expected to be convicted. She has been in detention for 14 of the last 20 years, since leading a pro-democracy uprising that was crushed by Myanmar's military junta.

The secretary-general, who visited Myanmar in July, said he also reiterated the international community's "high expectations" that the government act by taking timely steps to follow-up on the specific proposals he made to senior leaders "starting with the release (of) all political prisoners so that they could participate in a credible and inclusive political process."

"I expect that the authorities of Myanmar will respond positively and in a timely manner to the expectations and concerns and repeated calls of the international community to release all political prisoners, and particularly Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," Ban said.

During his visit, the secretary-general tried unsuccessfully to meet Suu Kyi but he said what was more important was the message he left with the country's leaders.

Soon after Ban returned to New York, Myanmar's U.N. Ambassador U Than Swe promised the Security Council that the government will free some political prisoners and allow them to

participate in 2010 elections, but he gave no numbers.

The secretary-general said he had no firm indication either. "I hope they will take necessary measures to implement their commitment," he said.

When a reporter noted that he appeared more optimistic about a positive response from the government than he was last week, Ban said: "I am working very hard to, first of all, mobilize the necessary political support for the democratization of Myanmar."

"I am representing the will and expectations of the whole international community, particularly the members of the Group (of Friends) of Myanmar to convey (this message) correctly to the Myanmar authorities so that they can respond positively," he said. "This is what I am expecting."

He said participants at the meeting agreed that the Group of Friends would meet again on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting of the U.N. General Assembly which begins Sept. 23.

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/06/key-nations-back-release-myanmar039s-suu-kyi.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Southeast Asian Nations risk dissension by ignoring human rights

Meidyatama Suryodiningrat , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Thu, 08/06/2009 10:02 AM | Opinion

Twelve years ago, the late Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas defended opening the door of ASEAN to authoritarian countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos by saying “No international organization places human rights as a conditionality of membership, not even the United Nations”. With democracy on the march in Indonesia, the largest country of the group, and unremitting political and civil rights violations in others – especially Myanmar – that precedence of process over substance has become a haunting liability for ASEAN.

For ASEAN, the ruling regime in Myanmar is an insufferable embarrassment to both soft authoritarian regimes like Singapore and thriving democracies such as Indonesia. The embarrassment was highlighted during the recent annual summit of the group at which the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton lambasted Myanmar for its terrible human rights record before an uncomfortable group of senior officials.

The so-called “ASEAN Way” – a preference for decorum based on non-interference and adherence to a consensus decision making process irrespective of the consequent iniquities – has so far guided the organization. The ASEAN “union” was in itself a remarkable achievement for a region which has no history of regional cooperation, and months before the founding still embroiled in low intensity conflicts.

The way that came to guide the group evolved out the vested interests of its five founding members – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – to create a passive regional environment which allowed them to focus individually on economic development thereby justifying their respective autocracies.

Beyond the fundamental issues of state sovereignty, ASEAN’s founders made it clear that, as stipulated in the defining Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), each member shall “lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion,” an arrangement of non-interference in the internal affairs of one another.

All 10 current ASEAN members had their roots in some form of autocracy. A few have emerged, most remain, while another reverted to non-constitutional means to overthrow government.

When ASEAN leaders gathered in Cebu, the Philippines, four months after the Sept. 19, 2006, military coup in Thailand, not a single member publicly rebuked or questioned the validity of the Thai representatives sent by the new military administration to the summit.

This history, in part, has perhaps led to an indulgent assent in ASEAN's approach to conditions on human rights in general and Myanmar in particular.

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2007 threatened to stall the ASEAN Charter if Myanmar did not release Aung San Suu Kyi. But the move was more grandstanding than actually making a stand. Everyone knew that failure to ratify the Charter would hurt Manila more, not the regime in the jungle fastness of Naypyidaw.

Situations where ASEAN has spoken up usually involves egregious violence, such as the case when in August 2007 demonstrations in Myanmar were violently put down. But even then ASEAN deferred action to the United Nations where ultimately Myanmar could usually rely on its most powerful ally, China, to cushion any rebuke from the UN Security Council.

Alienating Myanmar does nothing for ASEAN and only pushes the country further into China's sphere of influence. The last thing it wants is to hasten Myanmar's descent as Beijing's client state, the next North Korea, as it becomes China's backdoor to the Indian Ocean. An outcome that is not only upsetting to ASEAN, but a detriment to the emerging balance of power in the region.

Myanmar could fast become the frontline of regional power rivalry between China and India, with the latter anxious at having its North-Eastern defenses outflanked and its dominance in the Bay of Bengal challenged.

In the absence of a truly effective regional security framework, the keyword is stability. The human rights agenda, with its call for civil society, may ultimately lead to regime change. But the prospect of instability is a scenario unacceptable to all. ASEAN is always wary of unstructured change. China would have to deal with the widening spill-over of Myanmarese drug related issues affecting Yunnan province. Even India would have to resolve an escalating Naga insurgency along its border with Myanmar.

The US administration under President Barack Obama has unsurprisingly continued the tough rhetoric of its predecessor. That in itself will not prod ASEAN to make headway on human rights issues or change their overall tone towards Myanmar.

Nevertheless there are two interesting angles emerging not present during the past decade which may encourage ASEAN to do something more than the usual.

The first is the charm offensive of the State Department towards recommitting itself in the region, attending regional security meetings and the symbolic gesture of signing TAC. These gestures have won America untold "brownie points" among officials in the region. With the US proclaiming to be "back" in the region, ASEAN may have a stronger spine dealing with China.

The second was the happy coincidence of the appearance in the news of suspected links between Myanmar and North Korea in the nuclear field. While there was no confirmation about the suspected nuclear development or nuclear cooperation with Pyongyang, the mere speculation about it will reshape regional security thinking. There is no way Southeast Asia would want or need a "North Korea" on its porch.

Other than overriding security dilemmas, there is no reason to think that ASEAN will change its

dawdling approach to human rights in the region.

Nevertheless, the divergence of political values is increasingly creating a strain within ASEAN. A fact more evident in the last two years than ever before. As the *primus inter pares*, Indonesia is seeing its civil society begin openly to debate the relevance of ASEAN, which for four decades has been enshrined as the cornerstone of its foreign policy.

The rethink has emerged from a frustration at the lethargy and cosmetic changes ASEAN has endorsed on issues related to civil and political rights. Exasperation that despite recognizing itself as one of the most successful regional groupings over the last half century, it is eons behind its counterparts in Europe, perhaps even Africa and South America in setting mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

Moreover, there is dissatisfaction that key documents, the ASEAN Charter last year and the terms of reference for the ASEAN Human Rights Body, have been so watered down from their original intent that they become an aesthetic fig leaf to cover inaction.

Perhaps there is also the gradual realization among the civil society in many other fellow members that eventually nothing can change ASEAN in its human rights outlook if the association does not reinvent itself. After all, how much can one expect from an organization that was constructed to serve the convenience of its leaders and not the values of its citizens?

As long as it is profitable as an economic entity, ASEAN will remain intact with its members renewing their commitment. However, its members, driven by the diverse political interests of their citizens, are likely to begin looking at alternatives more suitable to their various political values.

Until then, as the handwringing over human rights shows, it will remain a region economically united, but ideologically divided.

The writer is the deputy chief editor of The Jakarta Post daily newspaper.

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/06/southeast-asian-nations-risk-dissension-ignoring-human-rights.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Malaysian state rejects Islamist call to ban booze

The Jakarta Post | Fri, 08/07/2009 4:58 PM | World

An opposition-ruled state in Malaysia on Friday rejected calls by an Islamic party to impose a blanket ban on the sale of alcohol in convenience stores.

Selangor state Chief Minister Khalid Ibrahim said that convenience store operators in the state capital, Shah Alam, have, however, agreed not to display alcohol bottles and cans in racks and sell them only upon request.

Stores in central Selangor state are already banned from selling alcohol to minors under the age of 18 and to Muslims, who are forbidden to drink by law.

The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, which is part of a three-member alliance governing Selangor, wanted to ban retail outlets in Muslim-majority neighborhoods in the state from selling alcohol. They claimed this was necessary to respect the sentiments of Muslims, but their demand was slammed by Chinese and Indian minorities who felt their rights were being eroded.

A statement by Khalid's office said the self-regulation by convenience stores in Shah Alam will be closely monitored and studied over a month before a standard formula is drafted for the rest of the state.

"This is the best solution. ... We believe this approach can curb social ills caused by abuse of alcohol and will deter students and young people from purchasing alcoholic drinks," Khalid said.

The move is seen as a compromise to appease PAS as well as its Chinese-dominated ally, the Democratic Action Party.

Khalid is a senior member of the People's Justice Party, another ally in the opposition alliance that is trying to keep peace between its two partners.

The disagreement between PAS and the DAP, while not causing any extensive rift in the alliance, underscores ideological differences that have strained ties particularly between conservative Muslims and religious minorities.

Ethnic Chinese and Indians, who make up about a-third of Malaysia's population, have long been suspicious of PAS, which has introduced policies such as banning gambling and nightclubs in a northern state that it has ruled since 1990.

The opposition alliance won control of Selangor's legislature last year and now rules four of

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

The Jakarta bombing: A lesson in inequality

Magda Safrina , Massachusetts | Fri, 08/07/2009 11:26 AM | Opinion

Although the JW Marriott and the Ritz-Carlton hotel bombings are still under investigation by the police, speculation on who blasted the bombs and the motives behind them is growing among the public.

Some elements in our society have started blaming each other for the failure of the authorities to provide peace in the country's most important city, while others are pointing fingers at who should be held responsible for the blasts. One thing is very clear, the Friday blasts included at least one message, if not many.

Furthermore, the government has so far focused only on the terrorist group related to Noordin M. Top, while in reality, there may be many others with a wide range of messages.

However, I do not wish to add to the speculations as to who is to blame for the blasts as it is the police that have to find the answers and reveal them to the public.

Radical Islamic groups are generally always blamed for bomb blasts in every single corner of the world, including Indonesia. With respect to the presumption of innocence and without adding blame to radical Islamic groups, I have written this article with the aim of putting into perspective, from an economic point of view, why radical Islamic groups exist in Indonesia and what allows them to flourish.

I strongly believe that a better understanding of these fundamental issues will help the government put in place the right development policies to strategically resolve the radicalism of Islam in Indonesia in the long term.

One may question why I draw the connecting line between development policies and radical Islam in Indonesia. What message do I want to deliver?

Is there really a line in between those two? We can go on and on debating this, but the bottom line in my opinion, is that radical Islam is a consequence rather than a cause.

Among Muslims, Islam is accepted not only as a belief, but also as complete guide to life. Islam teaches one how to lead a life of well-being. Islam teaches peace.

Islamic principles state that peace can only be restored in the presence of widespread social justice with the strong support of law enforcement.

Most importantly, through all its principles in various aspects of life, Islam rejects inequality,

including unequal access to economic opportunities and economic well-being. In regard to reaching peace, Islam also teaches its followers to fight back all forms of social injustice, so-called jihad, a teaching that may be understood by Muslims in a multitude of ways.

Indonesia has recorded significant economic growth in the past few years following the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 and has been applauded for its successful economic policies.

However, data shows that around 18 percent of Indonesia's population or equal to around 43 million people still lived below the poverty line in 2008 (using the standard of the Asian Poverty Line at roughly US\$1.35 per day).

The World Bank report shows the unemployment rate reached 8.4 percent in 2008. Indonesia's Gini Index, an index used to measure the degree of inequality in the distribution of family income, is 39.4 percent, or ranked 66th in the world.

The country's GDP reached \$510.8 billion in 2008 with GDP per capita at \$3,900. The GDP was contributed to by agriculture, industry and service sectors, measuring 13.5 percent, 45.6 percent and 40.8 percent respectively. The most interesting thing is the fact that agriculture absorbs 42.1 percent of Indonesia's work force whereas industry absorbs only 18.6 percent and services 39.9 percent.

This data reveals the poor quality of life that families involved in agriculture have in comparison to other sectors in Indonesia, ignoring other agricultural related problems such as limited access to land ownership, capital and market.

In summary, Indonesia is still struggling with many poverty-related problems, from poor access to healthcare, education and clean water as well as worsening urban poverty and all its complex problems.

On the other hand the government, in various partnerships with domestic and international corporations, aggressively exploits natural resources. People living around exploited areas are rarely involved in these economic activities conducted in their homeland.

In so many cases, they enjoy almost no benefit, rather they bear all the risks caused by the massive exploitation of those natural resources.

In addition, people are exposed to widening corruption and bribery practices found at every level of government across Indonesia. People also believe the judicial authorities across the board are reluctant to deal with corruption and bribery problems. Therefore, economic well-being as reflected in economic growth is really only enjoyed by a very small group of people, while the majority of the population does not enjoy these privileges.

When inequality has become so stark and the voice of frustrated sufferers finds no way to be heard, the fight for justice will always find its own way. And radicalism seems to be the most effective voice.

In conclusion, as long as social injustice still exists in Indonesia, I believe, those who are willing to sacrifice their lives by carrying bombs and other high explosive materials will always exist.

They are there to demand their voices are heard. They are there to fight for what they believe in.

Unfortunately, they are vulnerable to being used by certain people to intentionally create chaos in the country, or even by those who just want to send a short message to a particular audience.

The writer is International Business Scholar, Brandeis University, Massachusetts and founder of Aceh Initiative.

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/07/the-jakarta-bombing-a-lesson-inequality.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

ASEAN's curse

The Jakarta Post | Fri, 08/07/2009 9:15 AM | Opinion

Some people say the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a blessing and a curse for Indonesia. When democracy was still unthinkable here, Indonesia often hid behind ASEAN when the international community attacked us for our disrespect of the human rights and freedom of Indonesian citizens. Upon emerging as the world's third largest democracy, ASEAN is now more of a "curse" for Indonesia as we now find ourselves often making the same statements as western countries and international organizations did toward Indonesia during the Soeharto years.

When Indonesia faced international criticism for human rights abuses being conducted under Soeharto and during the occupation of East Timor, our neighbors often had to act as our defense lawyers. As the largest ASEAN member — in terms of population, geography and economy — Indonesia has the obligation to encourage the universal values of democracy and human rights to our less democratic neighbors. They will follow us if they see democracy has brought Indonesia much prosperity and strength. We must also remember however that Indonesia is still haunted by fundamental problems such as corruption and poverty.

Take the case of Myanmar as an example of the ASEAN problem. Since its admission into ASEAN in 1997, Myanmar has brought nothing but humiliation to the regional grouping, and will continue to do so into the future unless action is taken. The brutal generals in Myanmar have given no indication of when they will change their ways, but we need to remember that to a certain extent Indonesia was also once that embarrassing burden to ASEAN during its occupation of East Timor. Does that mean ASEAN will never become a powerful and respected organization because some member countries choose to go down the path of Myanmar and Indonesia?

As ASEAN will commemorate its 42nd anniversary Saturday (it was established on Aug. 8, 1967 in Bangkok), it is timely to look back on its achievements and failures. The governments in this region naturally tend to emphasize or even dramatize the success stories of ASEAN, while most outsiders have the opposite opinion.

What are the main sources of its failures and how can we overcome these difficulties? One thing for certain is that despite the major obstacles the group faced in the past — mainly democracy and human rights issues — and challenges of the future, ASEAN has been able to appear as a strong regional bloc at least on the surface.

For 12 years, western countries and international civil organizations have ridiculed the group for its inability to force the Myanmar generals to stop oppressing its people and release the country's legendary icon Aung San Suu Kyi. ASEAN leaders also fully realize the very expensive cost they have to bear because of Myanmar. But they are at a loss on what to do with the impoverished nation as the generals there are not concerned with a threat of worsening economic and political

sanctions from other countries, or even expulsion from ASEAN.

Indonesia, however, should also learn from its less democratic neighbors. For instance, while Singaporeans have less freedom in electing their leaders than Indonesians, in terms of good and clean governance we are left far behind the city state. We should avoid acting as big brother to our smaller neighbors. We wish to congratulate the organization members on its anniversary this Saturday. Happy anniversary!

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/07/asean%E2%80%99s-curse.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

'Terrorism an issue, but not crippling'

Ary Hermawan , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Fri, 08/07/2009 1:58 PM | World

The immediate reaction of the majority of Indonesians, when they found out another terror attack had again hit Jakarta, was probably the fear it would taint the nation's security image and damage its thriving economy.

But Belgian Ambassador to Indonesia Marc Trenteseau, who just completed his diplomatic tenure, told The Jakarta Post at his office recently the main deterrent to foreign investment was a weak judiciary, not terrorism.

"Terrorism is an issue," the ambassador said, "but, in my view, it is not a crucial one. *The terrorists* only represent a very tiny minority of Indonesian people... The police and the government have also taken measures to avoid the repetition of the *terror* strikes."

"I don't think it has eroded people's confidence in Indonesia, a country that has successfully proven itself and the world to be a stable and thriving democracy, able to withstand that threat of misled fanatics."

Trenteseau, who took up the Belgium ambassadorship to Indonesia in 2006, lauded Indonesia for having successfully carried prudent and coordinated macroeconomic policies, which not only boosted foreign investors' confidence in the country, but also helped the nation weather the global downturn.

He believed Indonesia was no longer a nation in waiting, a phrase coined by Adam Schwarz to describe the political condition of the nation with the biggest Muslim population a few years after the downfall of Soeharto. It is now, he said, a country in transition and is set to make its way to the developed world.

"Indonesia enjoys the privilege of having had a serious economic policy in the last five years, which has put the foundation of renewed growth."

But to get there, he said, the country needed to seriously address two major impediments: a weak judiciary and shoddy infrastructure.

"The judiciary should really be improved," he said. "It's a problem for everybody; a problem for the Indonesian society because they are not sure of the quality of the justice they will get, and also a problem for investors because the main elements for foreign investors to come to a country is for that country to have a proper judiciary."

On infrastructure, he said: "There's an urgent need for big investment in the transportation

system... You need to build more highways, railways and harbors. If this is being done, the *economic* growth and the betterment of living standard *of Indonesians* can be tremendous."

Belgium, whose companies have been operating in Indonesia for about 100 years, is looking forward to enhancing trade relations with Indonesia in the next few years when the country has reaped the benefits of reforms it is now implementing.

Indonesian-Belgium trade reached US\$1.9 billion last year, with Indonesian exports reaching \$1.3 billion. Belgium, which exports machines, chemicals, heavy equipment, chocolates, chemicals and high-tech products, was also among one of the important foreign investors in Indonesia.

For its part, Southeast Asia's largest economy mainly exports its traditional products like wood and furniture, textiles and garments, shoes and plastic to Belgium, the country hosting the NATO and European Union headquarters.

"We have different companies that have been here, are very active and keep on investing," he said.

Indonesia and Belgium have maintained a good bilateral relationship. In February, Vice President Jusuf Kalla went to Brussels where he was awarded the *Commandeur de l'Ordre de L'opold* (Commander of the Order of Leopold) medal for his role in boosting trade relations between the two countries.

In 2008, Belgian crown prince Philippe, Duke of Brabant, led a 80-strong trade and investment delegation to Indonesia and met a number of high-ranking officials, including Kalla.

In the global arena, the two countries do not have contentious issues. "Indonesia is a country that always tries to let its moderate voice be heard in the international community and is always supportive of multilateralism, like the UN and other international institutions. Belgium shares the same values."

"We had a very good cooperation and exchange of information during our common tenure of a non permanent seat with the UN Security Council *2007/2008*. Quite often, we shared the same views regarding specific issues like peace building in central Africa or the support to the road map in the Middle East Peace process. It's been a very good relationship."

Ambassador Trenteseau left Jakarta for Brussels on Thursday. His successor will arrive in Jakarta early September.

He said there were no specific places he liked best or hated most in Jakarta.

"What I will miss is not any specific part of Jakarta, but its people. They are nice people. It is a huge city in many ways. It's crowded; it has too many cars and too many ojek *motorcycle taxi*. But still, it's a place where you can live because people are friendly, and for that reason, this city remains very welcoming and a good place to live."

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/07/terrorism-issue-not->

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

New challenges to ASEAN

Andy Rachmianto , Jakarta , | Sat, 08/08/2009 1:34 PM | Opinion

On Aug. 8, 2009, ASEAN will celebrate its 42nd anniversary. It is quite natural that when celebrating its anniversary, ASEAN should ask itself what has been achieved and what should be done in the future. The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) made a historic move when its leaders adopted the ASEAN Charter in Singapore in 2007.

At the Singapore Summit, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said the ASEAN Charter could be the catalyst for speeding up and strengthening regional integration, and could enhance the process by which ASEAN transforms from a loose association to an ASEAN community. It also provides for an elevation of ASEAN into a rule-based and people-centered organization with a legal personality that rests on the pillars of political-security cooperation, economic cooperation and sociocultural cooperation.

The charter is based on the principles of respecting fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, the promotion of social justice and the upholding of the United Nations Charter and international law.

However, following its adoption, some people representing civil society have criticized the charter. Some even argue the charter is irrelevant as it does not reflect "the ideals of ASEAN".

To some extent, this assessment may be correct, taking into account that there is no provision in the charter that clearly mentions the involvement of "the people" and the establishment of any institutionalized mechanism allowing civil society to contribute to ASEAN's decision making process.

More importantly, is whether ASEAN really can act together in facing future challenges at the regional level, including its own internal problems such as the tension between Thailand and Cambodia over the Preah Vihear Temple, overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea or the problematic regime in Myanmar? How ASEAN will react to ongoing global crises such as climate change, energy security, food security and financial crises? Or how will ASEAN respond to the newly emerging regional architecture in the Asia Pacific, especially with the rise of China and India as regional powers?

The current regional architecture in the Asia Pacific is really a major challenge for ASEAN. Following the establishment of ASEAN, there are now other pillars of regional mechanisms that exist in the region, namely: the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the ASEAN Regional forum (ARF), the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) with China, Japan and Korea and the East Asian Summit (EAS). Since ASEAN as a group has been actively involved in all these regional mechanisms, ASEAN can only play its role if its members can cooperate more cohesively to solve

the aforementioned internal problems in the region.

But how will ASEAN be able to play a convergent role among all these regional mechanisms? The answer is clear; it is necessary to consolidate all the existing regional mechanisms in order to avoid duplication in terms of focus of cooperation and activities. For instance, which forum or mechanism should deal with social and economic cooperation and which one should be responsible for strategic political and security dialogue.

There is another serious challenge that ASEAN needs to deal with in the future - the institutional-building of a new regional architecture in the Asia Pacific. For the last few years, at least, among Track-Two communities, the idea of shaping a new East Asian institution as an overarching body for strategic dialogues and security cooperation has been thoroughly discussed. In their views, if it is based on size, population, GDP and strategic importance, the new institution or mechanism should not be a large group. Countries that would be eligible to join this new grouping are Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the US. They will be called the G-8 for East Asia.

But in order to make this grouping reliable as a future concert of power in East Asia, ASEAN as a group should be included, at least be represented by the chair and the secretary-general of ASEAN. Although it is not likely this new regional architecture will come into being in the near future, ASEAN should still be able to respond once the discussion of this new idea becomes more official in the region.

In this context, the proposal made by the Australian prime minister on the establishment of an Asia-Pacific community is an indication that a process leading to a totally new overarching regional architecture in the Asia Pacific has already started.

Behind Kevin Rudd's idea is a regional institution that spans the entire Asia Pacific region and is capable of engaging in a full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future security challenges. The proposal was also aimed at overcoming the compartmentalization of existing regional institutions by creating an effective leadership forum where major political, economic and security issues can be dealt with holistically rather than piecemeal.

Therefore, sooner or later, ASEAN should be ready to respond to it. Happy anniversary!

The writer is an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The views expressed are his own personal opinion.

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/08/new-challenges-asean.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Most wanted terrorist Noordin M Top eluded capture for years

Anthony Deutsch , The Associated Press , Jakarta | Sat, 08/08/2009 3:40 PM | National

Noordin Mohammad Top, an aspiring regional commander for al-Qaida who evaded capture for years until he was reportedly shot dead in a raid Saturday, has been linked to a series of bombings in Indonesia that killed 250 people.

The manhunt for Southeast's Asia's most wanted militant escalated last month when twin suicide blasts killed seven at the Ritz-Carlton and J.W. Marriott hotels in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta - ending a four-year lull in terrorism.

Noordin has most notably has been linked to the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, which together killed 222 people, the majority of them foreigners vacationing on the resort island. He emerged as a regional terrorist leader with extensive bomb-making skills after the first Bali bombing and is accused of masterminding at least three major strikes in Indonesia.

If confirmed, his death would mark a major setback for terrorists operating in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation.

Counterterrorism operations in recent years netted hundreds of suspected militants, including a number of Noordin's closest associates. But Noordin's time on the run seems to have ended in an hours-long shootout at a remote village in central Java where he had been holed up.

Police have not confirmed that his body was recovered from the scene, where a siege culminated in a burst of gunfire and explosions and police flashed each other a thumbs up.

Noordin, 40, formed his radical ideas in the early 1990s at a Malaysian boarding school headed by an Indonesian Muslim cleric, Abdullah Sungkar, who founded regional terror network Jemaah Islamiyah, which Noordin joined in 1998 after brief training in the southern Philippines.

He fled south to the Indonesian province of Riau in 2002 amid a crackdown on Muslim extremists in Malaysia in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, before rising to prominence in the Bali bombings.

A disagreement over targeting civilians caused split in Jemaah Islamiyah and Noordin formed a more violent faction, Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad, which he reportedly called the "al-Qaida for the Malay archipelago." Its aim is to create a common Muslim state in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines.

A claim of responsibility for the July 17 attac was posted on the Internet in his name, but its authenticity could not be verified.

The U.S. State Department had classified Noordin as a terrorism financier since the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings, but he managed to plot several other strikes while avoiding near capture half a dozen times.

Prosecutor say Noordin had ties to al-Qaida supported terrorist attacks, including the 2002 bombings on the resort island of Bali, the first J.W. Marriott Hotel attack in 2003, the Australian Embassy blast in 2004, and the 2005 triple suicide bombings on restaurants in Bali.

In July, police said Noordin was the mostlikely culprit behind the recent bombings, but he was not formally named as a suspect. His photo was widely distributed along with sketches of the suicide bombers and a \$100,000 reward for information leading to his capture was outstanding.

With more that 17,000 islands and a population of 235 million, Indonesia is a relatively easy place for a fugitive to go underground, and terror experts said he has had the help of a substantial support network and several wives.

The closest authorities have ever come to seizing him was probably in July 2008, in Palembang, a coastal city on Sumatra, in a raid that netted 10 militant suspects.

Special police units were also said to have been close on his trail when in November 2005 they shot and killed Azhari Husin, a close friend and technical operative of Noordin's.

"As long as you keep your troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and intimidate Muslim people, you will feel our intimidation and our terror," a masked man believed to be Noordin said in the message aired on Indonesian television at the time. "You will be the target of our next attack."

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/08/most-wanted-terrorist-noordin-m-top-eluded-capture-years.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Doubts raised that dead terrorist was top leader

The Associated Press , Jakarta | Sun, 08/09/2009 1:08 PM | National

Police scrambled Sunday to identify the body of a suspected terrorist killed in a farmhouse gunbattle after discovering a plot to kill Indonesia's president in a suicide car bombing.

Forensics teams planned to collect DNA samples from family members of regional terror mastermind Noordin Muhammad Top, who was reportedly killed during a 16-hour firefight with officers in central Java on Saturday, said Dynno Chressbon, a government anti-terrorism adviser.

One of Noordin's wives and children were traveling to the capital Jakarta to provide samples, Chressbon said.

Malaysian authorities were also coming to Indonesia to assist in the identification, he said. Noordin is a Malaysian citizen, blamed for some of the deadliest terrorist attacks in Southeast Asian in recent years, and a self-proclaimed al-Qaida commander.

Serious doubts were raised Sunday that a massive manhunt for Noordin had come to a close after seven years. "We cannot yet confirm that this is Noordin Top," national police Chief Bambang Hendarso Danuri said.

Chressbon expressed skepticism that Noordin was killed citing comments from former militants who told media that a militant leader would have never been left alone at a hide-out. Only one body was recovered from the scene.

"I indeed doubt that the victim is the suspected terrorist Noordin Top," he said.

Retired Gen. Abdullah Hendropriyono, a former intelligence agency, said he also doubted if the dead terrorist was Noordin.

"It is impossible for a terrorist like Noordin to walk or stay alone, without guards," Hendropriyono told MetroTV. "If he is just alone it is hard to believe ... As an analyst, I bet it is not Noordin."

Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told reporters in Canberra on Sunday he planned to speak with Indonesia's Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono later in the day to learn whether Noordin had actually been killed.

"It is still unclear as to who precisely has been killed and who has been apprehended," Rudd said.

Police on Saturday also raided a house on the outskirts of Jakarta where they killed two suspected militants and seized bombs and a car rigged to carry them, the police chief said. The house was just 3 miles (5 kilometers) from the president's residence.

Hendarso said Noordin and other militants had been plotting to bomb Yudhoyono's home. He said the decision was made at an April 30 meeting led by Noordin because of the government's execution of three convicted Bali bombers.

Yudhoyono told reporters he was briefed about an ongoing operation "to uphold law and to eradicate terrorism," but made no mention of Noordin.

"I extend my highest gratitude and respect to the police for their brilliant achievement in this operation," he said.

Noordin is also suspected of planning last month's suicide bombings at the J.W. Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels in Jakarta that killed seven people and ended a four-year pause in terror strikes in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation.

Noordin claimed in a video in 2005 to be al-Qaida's representative in Southeast Asia and to be carrying out attacks on Western civilians to avenge Muslim deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"If NoordinM. Top was captured or killed, this would be extremely good news and a huge step forward for Indonesia's struggle against terrorism," said Jim Della-Giacoma, Southeast Asia project director for the International Crisis Group think tank. "Whether or not the risk of further attacks declines depends on who else is arrested or killed with Noordin."

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/09/doubts-raised-dead-terrorist-was-top-leader.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Celebration amid global crisis

Lilian Budianto , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Sun, 08/09/2009 11:35 AM | Current Issues

The Southeast Asian grouping of ASEAN has reaped considerable grievances as it approaches its 42nd anniversary on Aug. 8, in a world that has already slipped into economic crisis and is facing different challenges than it did decades ago.

Activists have ratcheted up pressure on the ASEAN human rights body to be more powerful and asked the ASEAN government to push Myanmar to release thousands of its political prisoners; business groups have asked what the grouping can do now to ease the global crisis that has affected purchasing power of the people.

Meanwhile, to the people of some half a billion living in Southeast Asian countries, ASEAN might sound distant and the grouping is deemed to be a mere political gathering despite the new ASEAN Charter, which entered into force last December.

The Chapter pledged to facilitate some transition into a more united ASEAN, with possibilities of having the chance to live under one regulation and system in the coming future. Although, it was yet to be one community like the European Union, it could have a promising future ahead.

"I really have no idea what kinds of benefits it has to offer for working class people like us," said Linda Tan, an auditor with the PriceWaterHouseCoopers.

"But if it is meant to ease the regulation of people movement and working terms, it sounds great. It's not all about politics, then."

The ASEAN first anniversary after the coming into force of ASEAN Chapter might skip the attention with the minimal publication of benefits of moving into one regional community.

The notorious Myanmar has also most of the time taken the center stage in the grouping's agendas, overshadowing the progress in the economy and socio-cultural fields.

Under the Charter, the government has sought to streamline migration procedure for skilled migrant workers. Skilled migrant workers are subject to a certain period of stay within ASEAN countries and they are required to extend their working visa.

By 2015, Indonesian professionals are expected not to be subject to this rule anymore.

For the business community, they could enjoy tariff-free exports under the ASEAN Economic Community. For students, they could have more chance to study abroad under the ASEAN Cultural Community.

As ASEAN is comprised of some developing member-states, the opportunity might seem a chance to experience the better life offered by other member-states.

For those living in a country led by a dictator, it could sound like a chance to pave ways for better systems.

"I have to say that people of Myanmar feel secure that they were grouped under ASEAN... As for when our government acts erratically, it seems like we have somebody to remind our government *of how to act*. We still think democratic countries like Indonesia should have led ASEAN to act tougher on the Myanmar government" said a journalist from Myanmar who refuse to be identified.

Myanmar is ruled by a military junta, Brunei Darussalam is under the rule of an absolute monarch, Laos and Vietnam have single-party systems, Singapore and Cambodia observe elections with predictable results, Malaysia restricts political rights under its draconian Internal Security Act, leaving Indonesia and the Philippines as the main democracies in this region of more than 570 million people.

Critics say ASEAN has mistakenly continued to protect military-ruled Myanmar by watering down the mandate of the future ASEAN human rights body, while the West has slapped economic sanctions for the junta's notorious chokehold on democracy.

Senior researcher of Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) Dewi Fortuna Anwar said in a recent interview that although the new ASEAN under the recent Charter was still deemed toothless, it was nonetheless an important step to better rights enforcement.

"We might say that ASEAN is a failure in many things, but that doesn't mean we should forget about it. The challenges are harder in politics and security because they involve high political issues with a great level of sensitivity.

In the economy, we have some common goals, such as lowering tariffs and opening up the markets. But when it comes to politics, with goals of enhancing democracy, we might face challenges from countries with great political sensitivity.

"However, it has to be remembered that those are the challenges that make ASEAN relevant. If everything is good, we do not need ASEAN."

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/09/celebration-amid-global-crisis.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Guarding the spirit of ASEAN'

Sun, 08/09/2009 11:35 AM | Current Issues

*Even after four decades, ASEAN has not been able to silence its critics who doubt the organization will survive in the future, let alone form a Southeast Asian community by 2015. The bloc consists of 10 nations that analysts say are culturally, politically and economically too diverse to reach a consensus to enable them to act as a group and speak in one voice in the global arena. The Foreign Ministry's Director General for ASEAN, Djauhari Oratmangun, recently spoke to The Jakarta Post's **Ary Hermawan** at his office about the future of ASEAN and Indonesia's role in the organization, explaining why ASEAN is needed to help the region thrive and why its critics are nothing but pessimists who only see the glass half-empty. Here are the excerpts:*

Question: *Why does ASEAN matter?*

Answer: I'll give you simple logic. If I lived in Bintaro and wanted to go to meet my new friend in Menteng, I would expect my house to be safe. To be sure it is safe, I need to know my neighbors and the local community guards so that I could leave the house and meet friends elsewhere without a worry. This is what I call regional cooperation.

Some people are still questioning whether ASEAN is strong and solid enough as an institution to work for its members. What is your comment on that?

You answer my question first. How many people think ASEAN is irrelevant? One? ASEAN has to become more solid. Why? We have been able to keep the region peaceful and safe over the past 42 years, and we can see the economy is growing quite well, communication between state leaders is always cordial and people-to-people relations are also improving.

Because of this, our leaders are committed to the ASEAN Charter, which was approved on Dec. 15 last year. We are now in a stage where we would like to have a rules-based organization, so that we can create an ASEAN community by 2015 - which has three pillars: political-security, economic and social-cultural. We have made the blueprint for each pillar and this is a great achievement that indicates that ASEAN is solid.

My second argument is that other countries outside the region now consider ASEAN a strong organization as shown by their sending their ambassadors to the ASEAN. The European Union, the US and other major countries are paying more attention to the region. You know that it usually takes a painstaking internal process for a country to access the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation *TAC*, but some countries sped up that process in order to be able to cooperate with ASEAN because they believe they will benefit from it. The US is one example.

We have also established an ASEAN committee of permanent representatives, which means that

each member state must assign a permanent representative to the secretariat just like the United Nations. The committee will discuss in detail how we can implement the mandates of the charter and also the blueprints. This is another achievement.

Has Indonesia appointed its permanent representative?

I am currently the permanent representative ad interim from Indonesia, but this is because we are now in the transition period. We will appoint our permanent representative when the time has come.

Can you give a simple depiction of what an ASEAN community will be like?

We have agreed that by 2015 we will have a security community in which all states will be democratic and respect human rights, are capable of ensuring regional political stability, and are open to security cooperation with other countries outside the region that intend to participate in the process of keeping political security and stability in the region.

In the economic sector, we will have a free flow of goods and services among ASEAN countries. We are going to become a unified production center and will increase trade relations. We are going to have a mechanism to discuss regional issues such as haze and migrant workers. We are now discussing a dispute settlement mechanism. We would like to find solutions to our regional problems, we do not want other countries to settle our disputes.

What kind of role does Indonesia wish to play in ASEAN? Has Indonesia been successful in carrying out its missions?

We are part of the first five members of ASEAN, which means we are one of the original members of ASEAN. Our role is to guard the spirit of ASEAN, maintaining the idea that we need this organization. Now that we have the ASEAN Charter, our main responsibility is to implement comprehensively what is mandated in the charter. The charter's political security element was initiated by Indonesia, while the other elements have actually been around for four decades.

To guard also means to lead. We have recently been able to convince our partners that we need a human rights body. That's our leadership. People were previously pessimistic about it, said such a rights body would never be established in Southeast Asia.

But critics say the rights body is toothless and Indonesia has failed in its diplomacy to create a powerful body. What is your comment on that?

At one point, as the foreign minister said, we almost decided not to join the agreement to set up the rights body. It was nine against one. There was a fierce debate. Although we are disappointed, we did secure commitment from the other member states to review the elements of the body within five years. It will be stated in a political declaration signed by our leaders.

We see this as an evolution. It is impossible for us to get 100 percent consensus; this is the best we can get in the current situation. In the next five years, we will achieve what we are fighting for. Yes, we are upset and unsatisfied, but for ASEAN to agree on creating a human rights body was unthinkable before. If we want to see the glass half-full, this is indeed a significant improvement.

Are you optimistic countries like Myanmar and Cambodia in the next five years will accept the kind of a rights body Indonesia has wanted?

This is a process. As they have approved the rights body, they have bound themselves to our shared commitment. We have seen the region becoming slightly more open. Countries from outside the region would not have given priority to ASEAN if they had not seen improvements in the region's political sector.

What do you think of the existing perception that Indonesia is being too aggressive in imposing its values during the rights body debate?

We are not trying to please anybody. We were the second last country to ratify the ASEAN Charter because we had to be convinced that what we agreed on was equal to the national consensus. We have the obligation to ensure that our regional agreement on human rights is not lower in its quality than our national consensus, and also our commitment on a global level. If it is lower, then we do not need it.

Who is going to represent Indonesia in the human rights commission? Will he or she come from a civil society group or a governmental institution?

It will be an open appointment. We do not differentiate between NGO activists and government officials. Those who are considered capable will represent Indonesia in the commission. We will not embarrass ourselves as the country who has pushed for a more powerful rights body.

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/09/guarding-spirit-asean039.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

The peace dividend in Aceh

Michael Vatikiotis , Singapore | Tue, 08/11/2009 12:33 PM | Opinion

To visit Aceh today is to experience something the world rarely sees; the dividends of peace.

Five years ago when I last visited the capital Banda Aceh, it was like walking through a war zone. Piles of blackened, stinking debris and the ruins of destroyed buildings were virtually all that was left of the city a month after the devastating tsunami that killed more than 200,000 people across the province.

Ordinary Achenese, already suffering from more than thirty years of low intensity conflict, were broken and dispirited. How would they recover from so much death and devastation?

To find out, just pay a visit to the newly opened Tsunami Museum. The remarkable structure shaped like a basket, has been open barely a year, and crowds of Acehnese still throng its modern, spiraled hallways.

Through paintings, photographs and cleverly designed chambers which convey a terrifying sense of what it was like to face a roaring torrent of black water several stories high, Achenese recall the horror that tragically transformed their lives.

They visit the memorial park that has been designated around the 2,000 ton generator ship that was hurled with all the force of the wave several kilometers from its anchorage onto a small group of houses inland. In another location, the city is designing a small museum around a fishing boat still sitting atop a building, commemorating the 59 lives saved by that ship on the day of the tsunami.

Welcome to the tsunami tourist trail. What is so striking about the different ways the Acehnese are memorializing their tragedy is that at every turn they are reminded of the peace and security that accompanied the recovery and reconstruction effort.

It's hard to recognize downtown Banda Aceh as an Indonesian provincial capital, with its wide unbroken streets, tree lined avenues and orderly roundabouts.

Gaily painted concrete shop houses are sprouting everywhere, and the talk in one local coffee shop was about an expected scarcity of land as Achenese and immigrants from other parts of Indonesia flock to the regional capital, which has experienced a construction boom.

But even if there are growing complaints about the huge amounts of money contributed to reconstruction of the province running out, no one doubts the other major contributing factor to the province's new found security, which is peace.

Many Acehnese still find it unbelievable that just five years ago you could be arrested for not displaying an Indonesian flag in your vehicle, and now the man who sits in the Governor's office and the majority of local government officials are former separatist leaders. "All this is because of peace, not just money," says Iwan Samsuar, a local driver.

The most remarkable aspect of Aceh's transformation is that it remains very much a part of Indonesia. The visitor searches for signs of the particularism and distinctiveness that you might expect from an autonomy arrangement that is unique under Indonesia's unitary state framework.

Yet ahead of Indonesia's National day on Aug. 17, the city is a sea of red and white Indonesian flags, symbols of the President's Democrat party are everywhere, but I only saw one sign for the Partai Aceh, the new incarnation of the Aceh Freedom Movement or GAM.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who took the decision shortly after the tsunami struck in December 2004 to re-start the stalled peace process, garnered 90 percent of the vote in the province in last July's Presidential election, a higher percentage than he won anywhere else in the country.

Billboards across the city welcomed him to Aceh on a recent visit to inaugurate a new international airport.

In a province where people once reviled the Javanese who dominate the military and bureaucratic ranks of central authority, a Javanese president is now wildly popular.

The conflict in Aceh may not have been all that intense in a purely military sense, but the decades of enmity between the Acehnese and the apparatus of Indonesian authority, spawned a deeply entrenched independence movement, whose adherents and supporters now find themselves with a considerable measure of control over Aceh's future.

The process of accommodation and integration of the two sides was always going to be the chief risk to the peace process, and this has largely been achieved because of the successful democratic political process implemented since the peace agreement was signed in August 2005.

Few believed that Jakarta would allow the GAM to freely establish their own political party without massive interference from the center; fewer still imagined that the GAM would be satisfied with winning an election without using its victory to press the case for independence. Yet this is a conflict that has always had its roots in the sharing of spoils.

That's why the reconstruction of Aceh so evident today, and the expected returns in terms of revenue and investment are probably the most important dividends of peace. For if the Acehnese sense any betrayal of the economic promise of autonomy, old feelings of enmity and the threat of conflict will surely resurface.

As the Dutch learned after nearly a century of war with the Acehnese, subjugation leaves a legacy of hatred and mistrust. What the government in Jakarta has achieved through the twin policies of reconstruction and autonomy stand out as a beacon of what peace and reconciliation can achieve.

The writer is the Asia Regional Director of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, which mediated the first Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Aceh in December 2002.

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Issues: 'Religious fanaticism and terrorism'

Wed, 08/12/2009 1:16 PM | Reader's Forum

These days, terrorism is usually related to religion, more precisely Islam. Such perceptions are difficult to deny because terrorists like Osama bin Laden and Noordin M. Top cite verses of the Koran in justifying their acts. Some experts also state that the misinterpretation of religious text can provide the background for terrorism. For example, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and his students at the Ngruki pesantren often say that their first obligation as Muslims is to preach and promote Islam to others.

On the other hand, Andrew Lacy stated in his article "The Root Causes of Terrorism" (The Bark Network, www.bark.net.au [1]) that most terrorist activities today come from three main roots: imperialism, capitalism, and religious fanaticism.

Terrorism is the result of imperialism. We can see this in the fact that terrorists in Northern Ireland are former members of the army that fought against the British Empire. The rise of al-Qaeda is similarly the result of ideological war between the US and Russia, as it tried to colonize Afghanistan in 1979-1989.

Your comments:

In Indonesia corruption is still a big problem, as it makes the problems caused by capitalism - the growing gap between rich and poor - even wider. The rich can easily get richer through corruption. I would add corruption to the list, specifically for Indonesia.

Hendrik
NL, Canada

The author points out that imperialism, capitalism, and religious fanaticism are the root causes of terrorism while commentators have focused on corruption. Both seem more interested in condemning actions they find abhorrent rather than trying to understand terrorism and its causes.

These aspects more accurately target poverty and suffering as the root cause of extreme actions. Stop looking at politics and look at the people. Wherever there is violence there is a people in trouble whose needs are not being met.

If they are catered for and treated well we will no longer have terrorism. If you just assume they're all brainwashed, crazy or seeking revenge, you may as well give up.

Setay
Missoula, US

You state capitalism systematically seizes the rights of minority and impoverished groups. Look at Indonesia with its graft and corruption. This has nothing to do with capitalism but all to do with the values promoted in Indonesia.

How can anyone trust an Indonesian? Islam is failing in Indonesia. The relation between religion and the radical movements is directly related to poor education, ignorance of religions, brain washing and plain gullibility and naivety.

In Indonesia it is very easy to brain wash people because the education and religious system is easily controlled by a few individuals who tell the population what they should think.

The lack of outside knowledge is obvious and Indonesia's language is also a barrier to being both well informed and having a balanced opinion.

John Ralph
Jakarta

I agree with John Ralph. Capitalism has nothing to do with terrorism. Indonesia's education system and the interpretation and teaching of Islam have a lot to do with how terrorists are being recruited this day.

It's us against them, we are the right one against the non believers, the Muslims against the kafirs (infidels), the east against the west, and so on and so on.

I don't think society as a whole can totally erase this interpretation and teaching, until social justice and equality for all people is achieved in Indonesia.

Daniel Emerson
Indianapolis

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/12/issues-religious-fanaticism-and-terrorism039.html>

Links:

[1] <http://www.bark.net.au>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Shifting counterterrorism measures toward prevention

Hermawan Sulistyo , Jakarta | Wed, 08/12/2009 10:27 AM | Opinion

The JW Marriott and Ritz-Carlton blasts have provoked many questions.

Does the government have sufficient strategic counterterrorism policies? If so, why have these policies “failed” to prevent the recurrence of bombings?

These two interrelated questions have no easy answer, for it depends on one’s perspective and standing. A single explanation is always dubious, as they are too many factors involved, ranging from context to modus operandi. One of the many factors is a fallacy in public perception, even among decision makers, on strategic policies concerning counterterrorism measures.

The public, high-ranking public officials and intellectuals have failed to distinguish their comments on possible scenarios, perpetrators and their motives, from criticism of the lack of preventive and preemptive measures to contain terrorism. Even the National Police (Polri) chief’s statements swing from reactive to curative to preventive and preemptive actions.

Public discourse following the recent bomb blasts neglects the fact the investigation, pursuit and apprehension of suspects and pro-justicia actions as a legal process are all actions in a category that is reactive to curative. They are all post-factum analyses, perceptions, actions and policies. They are different from preventive and preemptive measures.

Preventive measures include security checks at hotel entrances, airports and other important locations, tight procedures on the trade of explosives, the possession of firearms and other similar preventive actions and policies. Preemptive measures include education, neighborhood watch, the battle against economic, social and political injustices, providing incentives for moderate religious leaders and so on.

Without firm, decisive and consistent policies on preventive and preemptive measures, it is impossible to expect reactive reactions — investigation, apprehension of suspects, court trials — in a post-factum situation that would produce satisfactory results in containing terrorism. The INP has conducted successful investigations of the bombings, particularly since the first Bali blasts in 2002 . The general public, however, has demanded more than the success of these investigations.

In the immediate future, preventive measures should include an increase of security checks and the implementation of security audits for all strategic locations. Security gates and portable security sticks usually only detect metal objects; they do not detect non-metal explosives. A qualitative increase of security personnel is therefore a must. They should be trained to be more familiar with

various types of explosives.

The government should focus on establishing preventive policies. Several years ago, the policy on arms possession was relatively lenient, although it was not as loose as some more liberal countries such as the Philippines. So were the policies on the trade of explosives. Chemical substances such as Kalium Chlorate (KClO₃) could be bought easily in the market. Other chemicals commonly used to make fireworks — very popular during Ramadan — were also abound in the open or black markets.

One of the most important policies in this prevention category is to conduct serious studies on terrorism in Indonesia. Despite relatively abundant studies that have been made available on various issues of terrorism at the international level, there is still a serious lack in the available database and literature on terrorism in Indonesia. Up to now, for instance, there has been no available data on the number of former-terrorists who have completed their jail terms, let alone their whereabouts.

Studies by the authorities are mostly based on secondary and even tertiary sources, particularly regular reports made available by Sidney Jones through the International Crisis Group (ICG). The situation is made worse by the absence of policies concerning the backup team of analysts.

Counterterrorism Desk at the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs, is only presided over by a handful of people, although it receives much help from Nasir Abbas, an ex-leader of Jamaah Islamiyah.

Various police and military counterterror units suffer a similarly difficult situation. The tour of duty and the system of promotion do not pave the way to the establishment of service excellence. There should be special treatment for members of such teams. Or at least there should be no discriminatory policies concerning their future career. It is no need to say that it is also necessary to provide them with more than sufficient instruments, tools and facilities.

These are only some of the problems related to counterterrorism. The basic idea is to shift the policies from reactive and curative to preventive and pre-emptive measures. Without serious commitment to shifting policies, terrorism will not be combated.

*The writer is a lecturer on history, specializing in conflict and terrorism. He co-authored *The (Police) White Book on Bali Blast* and edited *The Marriott Bombing: Stories from Survivors and Beyond Terrorism*.*

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/12/shifting-counterterrorism-measures-toward-prevention.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Shame on you ASEAN

The Jakarta Post | Thu, 08/13/2009 12:06 PM | Opinion

World leaders and human rights groups could only spew condemnation and anger in the direction of the chief of Myanmar's junta, Senior Gen. Than Shwe, for his continuous, merciless and brutal treatment of Aung San Suu Kyi, the country's incarcerated democracy leader.

Than Shwe's latest act of injustice came Tuesday, when he extended the Nobel Peace Prize laureate's house arrest by 18 months for allowing an uninvited American to stay in her home for two nights in May. One Myanmar general rendered the rest of the world's will irrelevant for no good reason.

Than Shwe and his cadres fully know that no one will ever be able to punish them, not even the world's most powerful man, US President Barack Obama, because the leaders of the other nine members of ASEAN – Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia – are staunch opponents of any efforts to punish Myanmar's heartless rulers.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the President of the world's third largest democracy, is a strong believer that persuasion and constructive engagement is the only way to lure Than Shwe into "repenting". This absurd belief is shared by the leaders of other ASEAN member states.

Shame on ASEAN leaders, especially those of democratic nations, who continue to tolerate the gross human rights abuses being committed in Myanmar. ASEAN leaders often cite fears that Myanmar would fall under the influence of China, or India, as an excuse for their inaction against Myanmar, while at the same time openly admitting the junta and its generals do not deserve any supports because of their unspeakable brutality.

As China and India close their eyes and pretend not to know what is going on in Myanmar, for economic and geopolitical reasons, we say shame on you too.

We urge ASEAN leaders, although we know very well that they have no guts to do it, to suspend Myanmar's membership to the regional grouping until the nation's generals surrender power to the country's supreme rulers: the people.

Morally, who is guiltier: Myanmar's generals, or those who continue to back them?

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/13/shame-you-asean.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Spying your neighbors

The Jakarta Post | Fri, 08/14/2009 9:32 AM | Opinion

Indonesians love to be described as friendly and tolerant by foreigners. Indonesians do not like to come across as suspicious with strangers because they believe in sincerity. But the recent bombings of two hotels in Jakarta, the arrests of alleged terrorists and the findings of substantial bomb materials in rented houses around the country, proved we have to pay very dearly for such a trusting behavior. We, Indonesians, are often too lenient toward our neighbors — especially newcomers — because we do not want to be perceived as unfriendly.

Residents of a housing compound in Bekasi said they saw a man who looked very much like terrorist Noordin M. Top. But they kept their suspicions to themselves, and they reported it only after the police raided a rented house and shot two alleged terrorists dead. More than 500 kilograms of explosive materials had been hidden at the house for sometime. They should have made their neighborhood unit (RT) chief or police aware that something was not quite right.

Residents in Telaga Kauripan housing complex, Bogor, West Java were shocked when they found out that Saifuddin Jaelani, a member of their community, was hunted by the police after the bombings of the JW Marriott and the Ritz Carlton hotels on July 17. Saifuddin, who rented a house in the housing complex, was later accused of recruiting one of the suicide bombers, 18-year-old Dani Dwi Permana.

Meanwhile, residents of Pela Mampang in South Jakarta, just found out from the media that a group of terrorists — which most likely included Noordin — was living in a house in their neighborhood. A resident told a TV station he was intrigued by the behavior of a teenager — whom he later discovered was the JW Marriott Hotel bomber — who often ordered four bowls of porridge without knowing who the other bowls of food were for. Unfortunately, the resident went on with his day-to-day life, without reporting anything to the local authorities.

Actually, there is a 2007 bylaw on public order, which demands each household report to the head of the neighborhood unit any guest staying for more than 24 hours. Unfortunately, most residents ignore the ruling, even though they are punishable with a 2-month prison sentence or fines up to Rp 20 million (US\$2,000).

But the above fact also highlights many Indonesians are reluctant to have any dealings with the police, as more often than not, the police's reaction is unpleasant and even painful at times.

Beware of any strangers around you. We should also remember that we have an important role to play in the prevention of terrorism, by being more attentive to our neighborhood. There is no denying it is crucial for us to keep a vigilant eye in our neighborhood, as all terrorists need a place to hide, live and prepare their next terrorist act. They need time to assemble bombs and transit for a

while before carrying out their terrorist acts.

We have to be suspicious of new people coming to our neighborhoods, particularly if they are reluctant to join in activities with other residents or if they often accommodating strange guests without reporting their stay to the neighborhood unit head.

It sounds cliché to say that fighting terrorism has to involve all elements of society. But given the events witnessed recently, it is clear that all people are needed to prevent any terrorist acts from reoccurring. Keep an eye on your new neighbors or visitors. Spy on them if necessary.

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/14/spying-your-neighbors.html>

The Jakarta Post

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

Bogged down in Palestine

Emanuel Shahaf , Jerusalem | Fri, 08/14/2009 9:50 AM | Opinion

President Obama's commendable effort to get Israel to once and for all renounce its damaging settlement policy to get the Middle East Peace Process moving again has actually turned out to be counterproductive, at least for the time being.

By highlighting Israel's present reluctance to compromise on the settlement issue, it has emboldened the Palestinians and their Arab and Muslim supporters to take a hard line and not agree to confidence building measures vis-à-vis Israel. Those very measures have always been at the heart of getting reluctant players on both sides to move forward again.

We only need to remember Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's courageous visit to Jerusalem in 1977 to point out the importance of such gestures. This visit helped ease Israeli hardliner opposition to the Peace Agreement with Egypt enabling Israel's withdrawal from Egyptian territory and eventually resulting in a Peace Agreement that both sides have adhered to religiously for more than 30 years.

Alas, on both sides there doesn't seem to be a statesman of the caliber of the late Egyptian President or, for that matter, Israel's late PM Yitzhak Rabin who made his bold and conciliatory move by committing Israel to far reaching compromise with Palestine and signing the Oslo agreements with late Palestinian President Arafat.

The fact that both, Sadat and Rabin were murdered by radicals in their own country who opposed any reconciliation with the other side, serves as a strong disincentive for politicians who contemplate bold moves.

As the situation stands now, Palestinians and Israelis do not appear ready for the sacrifices that a real peace agreement will require from them. The Palestinians are split between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank with few prospects for compromise.

Reflecting the US pressure on Israel, the Fatah movement's recent convention in Bethlehem (the first since 1989 !) agreed on a tough, not too confrontational platform which naturally will try to compete with Hamas hardliners while maintaining Fatah's position as the partner to make peace with.

At the same time, Israel, governed by a right wing coalition, is primarily concerned with the Iranian nuclear threat and maintaining the settlements to the extent mounting US pressure makes that possible.

This leaves the US administration with the unenviable task of trying to nudge the unwilling

opponents forward.

The surrounding bystanders, Arab and Muslim countries who could be supportive with confidence building measures, are hedging their bets preferring to wait until Israel will give in to US pressure.

President Obama is so far reluctant to play hardball preferring to put his trust in the common sense of Palestinians and Israelis alike who by now must surely recognize the inevitability of a negotiated solution based on the Clinton proposals put forward at the Camp David Summit in 2000 and major elements of the Saudi Peace Initiative of 2009.

Under such difficult conditions the likelihood of progress is indeed slight.

The only bright spot is a courageous Arab leader, the Crown Prince of Bahrain, Shaikh Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa.

He contemplated on the huge economic potential of Arab-Israeli cooperation wrote in an Op-Ed piece in the Washington Post on July 16 that the Arabs have not done enough to talk to the Israelis and have not done a good enough job demonstrating to Israelis how their initiative can form part of a peace between equals in a troubled land holy to three great faiths.

No doubt, as usual, the naysayers on both sides can justify their inaction. Let's hope that the players on the margins, Arab and Muslim countries who are not directly involved in the conflict, will consider contributing actively and positively to remove the impasse in the Middle East Peace Process.

The writer is a retired Israeli diplomat who served in Southeast Asia from 2000-2003.

Copyright © 2008 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara. All Rights Reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/14/bogged-down-palestine.html>

The Nation

[Print](#) [Cancel](#)

Opinion

The world still awaits a new us face

Published on August 3, 2009

THE RECENT suicide bombing at two American luxury hotels in Jakarta reminded the world how much Muslim extremists still hate America. The attacks at the JW Marriott Hotel and Ritz-Carlton Hotel, leading to nine deaths, including two suspected suicide bombers, weren't the first targeting US hotels and most likely won't be the last.

People hoping America under President Barack Obama will be more benign will perhaps be disappointed as the US continues to increase its war effort in Afghanistan with a high level of Afghan civilian casualties through airstrikes.

Although the US media was disturbed that 31 American deaths in Afghanistan last month were the deadliest since 2001, it pains foreign observers to see the reports dwell mostly on American deaths without those of Afghans.

USA Today reports on its front page last Monday that the Americans' combined death toll in Iraq and Afghanistan was inching close to 5,000. The story also told how two fallen soldiers killed in Afghanistan were transported back home and emotionally received by their families. Many poor young Americans end up in the war for lack of better employment opportunities and such a point hasn't escaped the US media. The article had nothing on Afghan casualties, however.

The current edition of US Foreign Policy magazine, simply refers to Afghan president Hamid Karzai as "a puppet", "with little hope of coalescing the fractured political scene". The US government, the magazine notes, considered Karzai "the least-worst option", however.

America's imperial military adventures are continuing, despite the withdrawal from Iraq, as Afghanistan becomes the new battle front. Concerns by liberal scholars such as Princeton University Professor of Religion, Cornel West, expressed when President Bush was in power, still ring true today as the Defence budget was recently given a two-per-cent increase.

"In the wake of the shock and horror of those [9/11] attacks, many asked the question, why do they hate us? But the country failed to engage in a serious, sustained, deeply probing examination of the possible answers to that question," West, a noted social critic, wrote back in 2004 in his best selling book "Democracy Matters".

West, who opposes US militaristic adventures abroad also wondered: "Will the American empire go the way of the Leviathans of the past - the Roman, Ottoman, Soviet, and British empires? Can any empire resist the temptation to become drunk with the wine of world power or become intoxicated with the hubris and greed of imperial possibilities? Has not every major empire pursued quixotic dreams of global domination - of shaping the world in its image and for its interest - that resulted in internal decay and doom? Can we committed democrats avert this world-historical pattern and possible fate?"

Obama may be different from Bush. He may sound more multilateral and not cowboy-like. Yet it's doubtful if even the new US president has the vision or the ability to transform the self-perpetuating US imperial military and keep the US away from imperial war.

There was much hoopla about Obama's recent visit to Ghana. The US media pointed out that Ghana was chosen, instead of other larger and more influential African nations, due to its democratic record and success. The same can't be said of Obama's earlier visit to Egypt, in which he refrained from criticising the repressive regime in Cairo which continues to receive huge amount of US aid.

Some are urging Obama to quickly reclaim America's human rights' mantle and come up with a clear human rights agenda, albeit not in the manner of the Bush administration.

Human rights expert and author of "Closing Guantanamo: From Bumper Sticker to Blueprint," Sarah E Mendelson warned: "The Obama administration has not embarked on the sort of house-cleaning or shift in organisational culture [within the intelligence services] that it needs to grow a new cohort of intelligence officers. Some retired intelligence officers tell me they worry privately about the lasting effect of the post-9/11 culture on the agency they devoted their professional lives to."

Obama may be tied with attempts to pass a health care reform bill or solve the economic crisis back home. Elsewhere, however, the world is waiting to see if there will be any significant change in terms of US military adventures, human rights and the commitment to not behave hypocritically.

Muslims extremists will continue to hate and want to destroy America - but ordinary Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide expect more sincerity and less hypocrisy from America.

Can Obama deliver?

The Nation

[Print](#)[Cancel](#)

Opinion

EDITORIAL

Money goes to waste in the deep South

Published on August 6, 2009

Conflict resolution and development will be achieved only via new attitudes, not by doling out funds

By just about any standard, a budget of Bt119 billion for a region of less than two million people is a lot of money. That's how much the Thai government has spent over the past five years in the deep South. The aim has been to win hearts and minds in a region that, in spite of having fallen under the direct rule of Thailand over a century ago, continues to question the legitimacy of the state that administers over them.

The sticky issue of government expenditure was debated at a Budget and Policy Responses to the Southern Provinces seminar last week at Chulalongkorn University.

Nirand Chomthong, a Budget Bureau official, highlighted the lack of coordination on policies and measures and the need to integrate budget and work plans among agencies in the restive region.

Chuang Chatariyakul, an official of the National Economic and Social Development Board, said the state doesn't have much to show in terms of success. Five years ago, 14 per cent of the people in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat lived below poverty line. In 2008, the figure went up to 17 per cent. (The poverty line is defined as people whose monthly income is Bt1,386). So much for the Bt119 billion budget.

Whispered one academic: "With this kind of budget, who wants the conflict to end?"

While there may be some truth to that remark, it would not be fair to conclude that government agencies are keeping the violence going so they can pocket the money. Yes, officials skim from the top, whenever opportunities arise. It doesn't have to be in the restive deep South. We see it every day on the streets of Bangkok, but we just tolerate it, that's all.

Nevertheless, bureaucrats at the seminar maintained that their respective agencies are committed to resolving the problems in the region, where roadside bombings and drive-by shootings are everyday occurrences. More than 3,500 people have been killed since January 2004 and the end is nowhere in sight.

Besides the Bt119 billion spent, the government of Abhisit Vejjajiva has just earmarked a further sum of Bt63 billion for community development for 2009-2012. It was hoped that the past five years would provide some sort of a lesson but apparently the government, like the administrations before it, continues to think that pouring more money into the region will help improve the situation.

Earlier in the Abhisit administration, there was talk of bringing back civilian supremacy, assigning a mini Cabinet to look at the deep South, as this would bring political accountability to the problem instead of throwing it back into the bureaucrats' laps.

But none of this talk has translated into anything meaningful. Deputy Interior Minister Thaworn Senneam took charge of drafting legislation to create the Office of the Southern Border Provinces (OSBP) but lacks the courage to move on it because he and Abhisit are afraid the Army will slap it down. With legislative backing, the OSBP would be entitled to some of the Bt63 billion being allocated to the military-run Internal Security Operation Command (Isoc). So, the return of civilian supremacy, apparently, is still a pipe dream.

If Thailand's history proves anything, it is that giving the military a lot of money to do development work will end in utter failure. Remember "Green Isaan"? The Bt119 billion poured in over the past five years should be enough to convince us that the Army needs to step aside.

While it is true that frequent changes in government haven't helped the situation, it should also be noted that none of these administrations have come up with any innovative thinking or new approaches to the problem. It is obvious that throwing more and more money at the problem hasn't helped, never mind won any hearts and minds among the Malay Muslims who continue to see themselves as colonial subjects.

But while officials were skirting around the issue of expenditure and the need to improve coordination, associate professor Srisompob Jitpiromsri, director of Prince of Songkhla University's Deep South Watch, hit the nail on the head when he said the country has been barking up the wrong tree. We keep pushing Thai nationalism down the throat of the Malays in the deep South as if this is something they really want. After all, nationalism, as defined by the state, has always been the sticking point between the Malays in the region and the rest of the Thai state.

Surely there are enough smart people in this government who can come up with a model under which the Malays in the deep South and the people of the Thai state can coexist peacefully. But if the past five years tell us anything, it is that the same old mindset and attitude towards the conflict has to change if we wish to resolve the problem.

We can start by taking the military out of the development equation and bringing back civilians to help end a conflict that is deeply rooted in the question of the legitimacy of the state.

Opinion

Asean risks dissension by ignoring human rights

Published on August 7, 2009

TWELVE YEARS AGO, the late Indonesian foreign minister Ali Alatas defended opening the door of Asean to authoritarian countries such as Burma, Cambodia and Laos by saying "No international organisation places human rights as a conditionality of membership, not even the UN".

With democracy on the march in Indonesia, the largest country of the group, and unremitting rights violations in others - especially Burma - that precedence of process over substance has become a haunting liability for Asean. For Asean, the regime in Burma is an insufferable embarrassment to both soft authoritarian regimes like Singapore and thriving democracies such as Indonesia. The embarrassment was highlighted during the recent annual summit of the group at which the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton lambasted Burma for its terrible human rights record before an uncomfortable group of senior officials.

The so-called "Asean Way" - a preference for decorum based on non-interference and adherence to consensus decision making irrespective of the consequent iniquities - has so far guided the organisation. The Asean union was in itself a remarkable achievement for a region that has no history of cooperation, and months before the founding was still embroiled in low-intensity conflicts. The way that came to guide the group evolved out of the vested interests of its five founding members - Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand - to create a passive regional environment which allowed them to focus individually on economic development, thereby justifying their respective autocracies.

Beyond the fundamental issues of sovereignty, Asean's founders made it clear that, as stipulated in the defining Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), each member shall "lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion", an arrangement of non-interference in the internal affairs of one another.

All 10 Asean members had their roots in some form of autocracy. A few have emerged, most remain, while another reverted to non-constitutional means to overthrow government.

When Asean leaders gathered in Cebu, the Philippines, four months after the September 2006 military coup in Thailand, not a single member publicly rebuked or questioned the validity of the Thai representatives sent by the new military administration to the summit.

This history, in part, has perhaps led to an indulgent assent in Asean's approach to conditions on human rights in general and Burma in particular.

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2007 threatened to stall the Asean Charter if Burma did not release Aung San Suu Kyi. But the move was more grandstanding than actually making a stand. Everyone knew that failure to ratify the Charter would hurt Manila more, not the regime in the jungle fastness of Naypyidaw.

Situations where Asean has spoken up usually involve egregious violence, such as the case when in August 2007 demonstrations in Burma were violently put down. But even then Asean deferred action to the UN, where ultimately Burma can usually rely on its powerful ally China, to cushion any rebuke from the Security Council.

Alienating Burma does nothing for Asean and only pushes the country further into China's sphere of influence. The last thing it wants is to hasten Burma's descent as Beijing's client state, the next North Korea, as it becomes China's backdoor to the Indian Ocean - an outcome not only upsetting to Asean, but a detriment to the balance of power in the region.

Burma could fast become the frontline of regional power rivalry between China and India, with the latter anxious at having its northeastern defences outflanked and its dominance in the Bay of Bengal challenged.

In the absence of an effective regional security framework, the keyword is stability. The human rights agenda may ultimately lead to regime change. But the prospect of instability is a scenario unacceptable to all. Asean is always wary of unstructured change. China would have to deal with the widening spillover of Burmese drug-related issues affecting Yunnan province. Even India would have to resolve an escalating Naga insurgency along its border with Burma.

The US administration of President Barack Obama has unsurprisingly continued the tough rhetoric of its predecessor. That in itself will not prod Asean to make headway on rights issues or change its tone towards Burma.

Nevertheless there are two interesting angles emerging not present during the past decade which may encourage Asean to do something more than the usual.

The first is the charm offensive of the US State Department towards recommitting itself in the region, attending regional security meetings and the symbolic gesture of signing TAC. These gestures have won America 'brownie points' in the region. With the US proclaiming to be 'back', Asean may have a stronger spine dealing with China.

The second was the news of suspected links between Burma and North Korea in the nuclear field. While there was no confirmation about suspected nuclear development or nuclear cooperation with Pyongyang, the mere speculation about it will reshape regional security thinking. There is no way Southeast Asia would want or need a 'North Korea' on its porch.

Other than security dilemmas, there is no reason to think that Asean will change its dawdling approach to human rights in the region.

Nevertheless, the divergence of political values is creating strain within Asean. As the *primus inter pares*, Indonesia is seeing its civil society begin openly to debate the relevance of Asean, which for four decades has been enshrined as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. The rethink has emerged from frustration at the lethargy and cosmetic changes Asean has endorsed on issues related to rights. Exasperation that despite recognising itself as one of the most successful regional groupings over the last half century, it is eons behind its counterparts in Europe, perhaps even Africa and South America in setting mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

Moreover, there is dissatisfaction that key documents, the Asean Charter last year and the terms of reference for the Asean Human Rights Body, have been so watered down that they become an aesthetic fig leaf to cover inaction.

Perhaps there is also the realisation in civil society in fellow members that nothing can change Asean in its human rights outlook if the association does not reinvent itself. After all, how much can one expect from an organisation that was constructed to serve the convenience of its leaders and not the values of its citizens?

As long as it is profitable as an economic entity, Asean will remain intact with its members renewing their commitment. However, its members, driven by the diverse political interests of their citizens, are likely to begin looking at alternatives more suitable to their various political values. Until then, as the hand-wringing over human rights shows, it will remain a region economically united, but ideologically divided.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 14, 2009 11:23 am (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

The Nation

[Print](#)[Cancel](#)

Opinion

EDITORIAL

Hope for democracy lives on in Burma

Published on August 8, 2009

Though the bloody 8888 has left people quaking in fear, their fight for freedom has not waned

Today is the 21st anniversary of the first popular uprising in Burma that was violently crushed by the country's military regime. The response was so brutal that even two decades later the Burmese people continue to live in fear. Thousands of people were gunned down like flies and despite the fact that more than two decades have passed, the junta hasn't let up on its brutal tactics.

August 8, 1988, commonly referred to as "8888", was the start of a long revolution for the Burmese people against an awful regime. More than 3,000 people's lives were brutally cut short for simply demanding a freer society and that the government cater to their needs. In short, all the people wanted was a decent government that could provide them with the basic goods and services.

However, apparently meeting these needs was far too difficult for the military junta, so they responded with bullets and tanks.

Still, more than two decades later, the spirit of Burma's democracy shows no signs of waning. Young activists continue to work hard, putting their lives on the line to tell the world about the atrocities being committed by the government against its own people.

The "8888 generation" continues in its quest for political freedom and openness despite the great risks they face. Two years ago, Burmese people from all walks of life, together with thousands of Buddhist monks, took to the streets to once again call for change. They came face to face with the soldiers who, as video footage has shown, did not once hesitate in using violent means to crush the demonstration.

When the dust settled, there were reports that demonstration leaders, including saffron-robed monks, had been hunted down one by one, snatched from their beds and never seen again.

As in the past, this wave of violence caused an international outcry and forced the UN Security Council to sit up and take notice. Still, progress has been slow.

Early last May Cyclone Nargis devastated more than 1.2 million villagers, and the international community responded with great sympathy and an influx of humanitarian assistance. Some of this aid arrived on naval ships, but as expected the junta preferred to see its own people rot to death rather than allow alien ships to dock on its shores to unload food and medical supplies. In fact, the ships weren't even allowed to enter Burmese territorial waters.

Asean hoped that it could use the incoming foreign assistance as a catalyst for some sort of political change. Yet the grouping and the rest of the international community learned that giving the Burmese junta the benefit of the doubt can be quite costly. No amount of pressure from Asean or even international sanctions has worked.

Economic rehabilitation and restructuring, as expected, have been used as tools to strengthen the regime's grip on power.

Besides a generation of activists with an unwavering commitment to peace and national reconciliation, the 8888 generation also brought to the forefront Aung Sang Suu Kyi, one of Burma's best-known political prisoners.

Suu Kyi, currently being subjected to a farce of a trial, faces the prospect of going to prison yet again. However, the recent decision to postpone the verdict on her suggests that the junta is wondering how to deal with a case as sensitive as hers. In a country where every little move is analysed from top to bottom, the decision could be a cause for hope.

The presiding judges said they had decided to postpone the verdict because they needed to review several "legal problems". Strangely, in a country where the judiciary system and the junta leadership are more or less two sides of the same coin, the idea of them reviewing legal problems might offer a glimmer of hope.

Still, as the experience of Cyclone Nargis has shown, anybody who gives the junta the benefit of the doubt gets burned in the end.

A decade ago Asean was using words like regional integration as a justification to let Burma into the grouping. It was a nice way of saying we don't want to see them get too close to China.

Well, as the old saying goes, you reap what you sow. Asean now needs to step up and correct this mistake and do it by any means necessary.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 14, 2009 11:04 am (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

Opinion

Iran boosting nuclear ability to benefit her people

Published on August 8, 2009

Re: Israel's Iran dilemma: to strike or not to strike, July 31, Opinion

With reference to the article by Kumar Krishnan, I would like to draw the attention of the readers of The Nation to the following:

All nuclear activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran are under international supervision and categorised as peaceful by the relevant organisations, and these progressive capabilities are solely aimed to benefit and advance the standard of living of the Iranians and ensure a sustainable source of environmentally friendly energy. However, it is noteworthy to mention that any advance and development by Iran or other developing countries has always been branded as a threat by certain countries and described as a danger to the so-called international (better to limit it to a few countries) community.

Unfortunately the author of the article has deliberately ignored the true causes of the instability and chaos in the Middle East, and this has made his article one-sided and biased. Therefore I would like to recommend further study of this sensitive issue for a better judgement.

The instability in the region originated from the outset from the illegal establishment of the Zionist community in the occupied territories of Palestine. The unlimited support of this illegitimate regime by certain powers has never helped it gain legitimacy in the region and will "surely" not help in the future until and unless the full rights of the Palestinian people are restored.

As is mentioned in the article, the main worry of Zionism is the ongoing revival of Islamic values in the region, which are at odds with the long-term objectives of the regime for expansion and aggression. The awakening of the Muslims in the region, especially in Palestine, can be rightly described as the most serious challenge to this illegal entity and has made it a nightmare to its leaders.

The current media campaign of the Zionist regime carried out by its sympathisers around the world is based on the delusion that by deflecting public opinion toward a third subject, the Zionist leaders will buy enough time to proceed with their continuous expansion of illegal settlements and at the same time blame others for the genocide.

Understanding the fact that any retreat from the previous position and suppressing the aggressive instinct of the Zionist regime will eventually result in the obliteration of that community proves the assumption that this effort to escalate the rhetoric against Iran is designed to continue for some time directly or indirectly.

Anyway, Iran is always prepared to defend her own interests and assets and maintain national security and will respond decisively to any adventurous steps taken by anybody from any corner of the globe and their associates and allies.

Once more it should be noted that true peace will materialise through the betterment of the living conditions of the Palestinian people and full restoration of the rights of the true owners of Palestine.

AKBAR KHODAEI

IRANIAN EMBASSY, BANGKOK

We need red tape to save us from ourselves

Re: The Suthep stories refuse to go away, Editorial, August 7

We cannot change human nature. We all have interests that feed our ego, regardless of how benevolent we like to portray ourselves to be. Deputy PM Suthep Thaugsuban is a perfect example of this.

While his job is to support the prime minister in the best interests of the country, rumour has it that he spends most of his time as a so-called king-maker, cutting deals for people so that they can be appointed in return for special favours. Most alarming is the faint possibility that he might be helping former PM Thaksin Shinawatra to return to Thailand. How his actions benefit the country is beyond me.

So much for integrity. In the real world, integrity is only for show. Until people feed their ego, they will always have a hidden agenda to do things in their own best interests. It is sad, but true. That is why we need so much red tape, checks and balances and law to protect us from ourselves.

OUTRAGED TAXPAYER

BANGKOK

Easy solution: build a wall to keep them out

Re: Money is wasted in the deep South, Editorial, August 6

Resolution will only take place if attitudes can be changed. Here are two examples:

I Let Thailand give the South, including the Malay Muslims residing there, to Malaysia.

I Give the South to the Malay Muslims and let them make their own "new country" between the borders of Thailand and Malaysia.

Then build a new border between Thailand and the new country, with, for instance, a big wall.

MARK RUBEL

THE NETHERLANDS

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 17, 2009 03:54 pm (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

Regional

Suu Kyi, junta part of Burma's problem and solution: Goh

Published on August 10, 2009

Singapore views Burma's military junta and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi as equal parts of both that country's problems and the solution leading to its democratisation, its leaders said at the weekend.

They also pointed out that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), of which Burma is a member, has no ability to play a crucial role in making changes in the military-ruled country.

Burma's political situation has been in stalemate for nearly two decades, since the junta refused to hand over power to Aung San Suu Kyi when her National League for Democracy won a 1990 election. Instead, they put her in jail. She is now on trial again after being visited by an American, John Yettaw, who swam across Inya Lake in May to reach her home, where she is still confined.

"In the view of the West, Aung San Suu Kyi is seen as the solution. But in my view, she is [only a] part of the solution, she cannot be the [whole] solution. At the same time, she is also part of the problem," said Singapore's former prime minister Goh Chok Tong.

He said Suu Kyi should not think that her National League for Democracy party remained the "legitimate government" that was "thrown aside" by the armed forces 19 years ago.

"In Third-World countries, once there is a coup, you are out. You can't be going back. If she wants to come back to take charge of a government, then she must find a way to win the next elections, which should be held next year," Goh told visiting journalists from Asean countries and the Middle East.

Goh said a national reconciliation plan that would bring Burma on to a democratic path could not leave out the military. It has been given a quarter of the seats in parliament, control of key ministries and the right to suspend the Constitution at will.

"You can't just take away the army and let the people run the country," he said. "They have to worry about their own lives, the lives of their families, their own careers. Therefore they have to be a part of the solution, even though they are now a part of the problem."

Goh, who visited Burma in June, said he had told the junta's paramount leader Than Shwe that next year's election must be free, fair and legitimate, and all parties, including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, must participate.

"[I told him:] if Aung San Suu Kyi is not allowed to participate, you may win the election, but many Myanmar (Burmese) and people outside Myanmar will say this is not a legitimate election because the force that could have defeated you was not allowed to participate," Goh said.


In a separate meeting with Asean journalists, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said he agreed with Goh, who is now a senior minister.

He said Burma had an opportunity to adjust its stance because the United States had a new government under President Barack Obama, who was ready to rethink its position, and Europe was also changing its position.

"Therefore, there are some opportunities for Myanmar to take suggestions, to shift its position; adjust its position. Not completely, but starting from where they are and showing that they understand this and make improvements," he said.

Lee said Burma should make changes by itself. Asean's ability to move anything in Burma was very limited because interactions and trade relations with Burma were not large enough to have any influence.

"Within Asean, Thailand is most significant. But when Asean buys gas from Myanmar, I think Thailand is dependant on Myanmar, not Myanmar is dependant on Thailand," he said.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 17, 2009 04:08 pm (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

National

OIC envoys taken on South trip

Published on August 10, 2009


Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya yesterday led a team of delegates from the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on a visit to Pattani's Yarang district in the deep South.

The visitors included 42 diplomats from member countries of the OIC and 13 members of the media from Muslim countries. Kasit said the visits would help delegates understand government efforts in solving insurgent violence and in improving the quality of life among the Muslim population of the three southernmost provinces

The visits concentrated mainly on Fort Sirindhorn and its centre for self-sufficiency economy philosophy. "The delegates witnessed government efforts in the area, the transparency in development projects and determination of the government to solve the problems," Kasit said after the visits.

Kasit said the world community now had more understanding of the problem in the deep South, after three previous meetings between Thai and officials of Muslim countries - a recent OIC meeting in Damascus, a Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Egypt, and discussion in Bahrain with Asean members and a six-nation grouping of Middle Eastern countries.

Meanwhile, a deputy village head was shot dead in a drive-by shooting in Narathiwat's Ra Ngae district early yesterday morning. Beisa Sulong, a 27-year-old Muslim official in charge of local security operations, was killed instantly on a local road after two men on a motorcycle rode by and shot him, before fleeing. His wife was slightly injured. Security officials theorised the attack was carried out by insurgents.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 17, 2009 04:18 pm (Thai local time)

www.nationmultimedia.com

The Nation

[Print](#)[Cancel](#)

Regional

SUU KYI'S TRIAL

Bangkok to consult with Asean on next move

Published on August 11, 2009

Thailand will consult with other Asean countries before deciding the next move following Burma's court sentenced democracy idol Aung San Suu Kyi to additional 18 months under house arrest.

Thai Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya said "We are well aware that the trial was done in line with Burma's legal process. However the case has drawn attention from the world communities," he said.

The ministry will wait for full verdict of the trial from the Thai embassy in Rangoon which will take about one or two days.

Suu Kyi, 64, was found guilty of breaking the terms of her detention by allowing a US national to swim into her lakeside compound-cum-prison on May 3.

The 18-month sentence means the opposition leader will still be under house arrest when Burma's general election is due to take place next spring.

Meanwhile European Union criticised the trial as "unjustified" while England branded as "sham trial."

The European Union said Tuesday it would stiffen its sanctions against the Burmese regime following the "unjustified" sentencing of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The European Union condemns the verdict against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, and the unjustified trial against her," the EU's Swedish presidency said in a statement issued on behalf of the bloc's 27 member states.

"The EU will respond with additional targeted measures against those responsible for the verdict. In addition, the EU will further reinforce its restrictive measures targeting the regime of Burma/Myanmar, including its economic interests," the statement said.

The EU's current sanctions, which were recently extended until April 2010, target some 500

regime figures and their families, as well as some 80 businesses linked to the regime.

In London, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said Tuesday he was "saddened and angry" at the conviction of Suu Kyi.

Brown said he was "saddened and angry" at the conviction following a "sham trial."

In a strongly worded statement, he said the sentence was proof that the ruling military junta was "determined to act with total disregard for accepted standards of the rule of law."

The elections, planned in Burma for 2010, would have "no credibility or legitimacy" without the participation of Suu Kyi, described by Brown as a "beacon of hope."

Brown said he would write Tuesday to all members of the UN security council to impose a worldwide ban on the sale of arms to the regime.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 14, 2009 10:58 am (Thai local time)

www.nationmultimedia.com

Opinion

EDITORIAL

No surprise at Suu Kyi's latest punishment

Published on August 12, 2009

Jail term is simply a ruse to keep Burma's opposition leader out of the scheduled election next year

As expected the internationally condemned trial of Burma's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi has ended with a guilty verdict and an 18-month sentence handed down to her for violating the terms of her previous house arrest. Suu Kyi will now have to remain under house arrest for a further 18 months, just long enough for her to be unable to take part in the general election set for next year.

While it is generally agreed the so-called democratisation process in Burma is a sham, Suu Kyi's participation would have lent a degree of legitimacy to the process.

Despite tilting the ground rules for the election absurdly on the side of the military junta, the generals still do not want her anywhere near the process. If anything, this illustrates the enormous fear these men in uniform have of this lady.

The sentence has naturally provoked anger in countries all around the world, including some Asean members who are fed up with Burma continually dragging the regional grouping into controversy.

The court at Rangoon's notorious Insein Prison sentenced Suu Kyi to a three-year jail term plus hard labour for breaching the terms of her house arrest following an incident in which an American man swam to her lakeside residence in May.

John Yettaw got three years for breaching security laws, three years for immigration violations, and one year for a municipal charge of illegal swimming.

Burma's Senior General Than Shwe reduced Suu Kyi's sentence to 18 months' house arrest. Is he trying to show the world that he has a heart? Two female aides who live with Suu Kyi also had their sentences reduced to 18 months.

In a statement, Than Shwe said he had reduced Suu Kyi's sentence because she is the daughter of Burma's independence hero General Aung San. The aim is to preserve peace

and stability in Burma and to ensure the country goes along its "democratic path".

The 18-month sentence will ensure that Suu Kyi is not free during the period leading up to Burma's planned general election next year, probably in May.

"I felt bad about the trial but did not want to interfere with the legal process," Than Shwe said in his message.

Well, whoopdi-doo! General Than Shwe feels bad!

Suu Kyi has been in detention for 14 of the past 20 years, since Burma's ruling military junta refused to recognise her National League for Democracy's landslide victory in the election of 1990.

Burma's state-run newspaper, The New Light of Myanmar, has had the audacity to tell the world to keep out of it and also warned its own citizens not to cause trouble.

"The people who favour democracy do not want to see riots and protests that can harm their goal," the government mouthpiece said.

The military has ruled the impoverished nation with an iron fist since 1962.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 17, 2009 03:50 pm (Thai local time)

www.nationmultimedia.com

Business

Cabinet set to discuss 'Strong Thailand' plans

Published on August 15, 2009

The Cabinet will next week consider some of the 400 projects listed for potential funding under the Bt200-billion "Strong Thailand" programme, Finance Ministry permanent secretary Sathit Limpongpan said yesterday.

As chairman of the committee screening investment projects under the second economic-stimulus package, Sathit said that to be eligible projects must be capable of completion within a year and have been listed in the Budget Bureau's e-budgeting programme.

He said that in the remainder of this calendar year, the government should invest a total of Bt27.5 billion - Bt13 billion to finance investment projects and Bt14.5 billion to increase the capital of state-owned financial institutions. The Finance Ministry had earlier planned to borrow Bt200 billion to cover a tax shortfall. However, Sathit said that as the shortfall was narrower than expected, the ministry would seek Cabinet consent to add the difference to the government's investment budget.

Meanwhile, the ministry will submit the draft land- and property-tax bill to the Cabinet on August 25, now that the public-hearing process is complete.

Somchai Sajjapongse, director-general of the Fiscal Policy Office, said that once the Council of State reviewed the draft legislation, the bill should be presented for parliamentary review by the end of the year.


He said land- and property-tax collection would start in 2012. The draft bill also waives taxes for low-income earners whose land and property is worth less than Bt1 million.

He said the law would increase the efficiency of land use, as surveys had shown that up to 75 per cent of land was unused and 90 per cent of the population owned less than 1 rai of land a head.

"Some landlords have voiced opposition to the law. Our role is to educate everyone that the law does not increase taxes but subjects all parties to fair taxation. It's up to politicians what they do with the bill," he added.

The Treasury Department is surveying 30 million plots nationwide so that it can update

evaluation prices. The new rates will be announced on January 1, 2010, in order to accommodate land-tax calculation.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 17, 2009 11:42 am (Thai local time)

www.nationmultimedia.com

Opinion

EDITORIAL

Obama will show his mettle over Iran

Published on August 16, 2009

Soft talk may be the way out of a crisis where a big stick might only unite enemies

The US stands to be branded the "Evil Empire" once more if its moves anger Russia or China, or if a third war breaks out in the Middle East. The volatile situation in Iran has become the first major challenge to US President Barack Obama. As it stands, it appears that his approach is significantly more acceptable internationally than the policies of George W Bush.

The current US administration has expressed solidarity with Iranian demonstrators after they took to the streets to protest against the June 12 general election. Iran is no longer considered a member of "the Axis of Evil", as it was under Bush.

Three million demonstrators are said to have come out to protest against the poll result, which they believed to be fraudulent, with scores being brutally crushed and killed in Tehran. The protesters came out in full force to support reformist candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi. To this day, sporadic protests and chants of "Death to dictators!" continue.

The US government has been reluctant to make a decision on what to do regarding the highly fluid situation in Iran. Before the election, Obama was trying to establish some sort of relationship with Tehran. This is in contrast to Bush, who treated this powerful nation with ridicule.

However, Obama's policy team never anticipated the massive protests, and the White House seems reluctant to criticise Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's "victory" and the resulting bloody handling of the protests.

Elsewhere, the uprising has drawn sympathy and support. Disturbing pictures of protester Neda Agha-Soltan being killed are now iconic images around the globe of the Iranian struggle.

Now that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has officially endorsed Ahmadinejad for a second term, Washington is finding itself caught in a Catch-22 scenario.

If the US government becomes too assertive, it will be seen by some Iranians as a renewed attempt to meddle in Iran's internal politics, something America was rightly blamed for in the 1950s when it worked with the British to depose the democratically elected government of Mohammed Mossadeq and replaced it with the Shah, who was eventually brought down in the 1979 revolution.

But if Obama doesn't act decisively enough, then he will be disappointing many Iranian lovers of freedom and democracy.

Last week New York Times columnist Roger Cohen wrote of his experience observing and covering the protest in Tehran: "Some protesters I met on the streets of Tehran pointedly asked me: 'Where's Obama?'."

In addition, as if the conundrum of democracy were not complicated enough, there's also the issue of a possible nuclear Iran.

Washington has given Tehran until September to engage in dialogue about its nuclear programme, but the clock is ticking fast, and observers are afraid of what might transpire in the Middle East if Israel should decide to launch a pre-emptive strike. This would plunge the whole Mideast into a whirlpool of conflict and violence.

What is Obama going to do, given that China and Russia might back Tehran? Already, Cohen observed, "Iran is awash in Chinese products - trade that boomed in recent years - and it supplies 15 per cent of China's oil."

This is almost like the China-Burma ties that enable the Burmese military junta to hang on to power, seemingly indefinitely.

Cohen, who is a close observer of Tehran-Washington affairs, said Iran's leaders knew that the United States had no stomach for a third war in the Middle East. Stories about broken families and a rising rate of suicide among US servicemen and women deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to influence decisions on foreign relations.

Still, some old habits die hard, and some low-brow newspapers couldn't help suggesting to Obama on Tuesday: "The US appropriately is standing back and allowing the crisis to play out. It mostly is a win-win scenario. If the moderates prevail, new doors may open. If the hard-liners crush the opposition, they will lose legitimacy in the eyes of their own people. But if the US meddles, it might ignite united opposition.

"That's not to say, however, the US can't exploit an adversary's moment of political weakness. It's an opportunity, for example, to step up efforts to split Syria from its alliance of convenience with Iran. More important, the destabilised regime might be more vulnerable to economic sanctions aimed at stopping Iran's nuclear programme."

So what should Obama's new policy on Iran be?

How can Washington appease both the rival forces in Iran while taking the fear of Israel into consideration, as well as the concerns and grievances of many in the Middle East, plus win support from China and Russia without being branded as the "Evil Empire" again?

This is a very tough challenge for Obama to overcome and will test both his resolve and his intelligence.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 17, 2009 03:51 pm (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com

Opinion

WHAT OTHER SAY

US policy and objective incoherent on militancy

Published on August 17, 2009

Going by the views that the various US officials have been expressing after Pakistan's successful operation in Swat, it's to be expected the US President's special envoy Richard Holbrooke's agenda for his forthcoming visit to Islamabad would figure prominently the demand for pressing ahead with the military campaign to cover South Waziristan.

But, strangely at the same time, the US is shying away from appreciating its implications for Pakistan and its own and its Western allies' responsibilities to an extent that one gets the impression the US is not quite clear about its strategic objective concerning militancy.

On the one hand, eliminating it is characterised as a major initiative of Washington's policy; on the other, it hums and haws at delivering on its commitments that should help achieve that objective.

For example, necessary financial assistance, particularly when Islamabad's straitened circumstances are taken into account, is of vital significance in this regard. Yet, the Congress adjourned for summer recess before giving approval to the much-banded-about US\$7.5 billion (Bt255 billion) aid to be given to Pakistan over a period of five years, and one is not too sure how soon it gives approval after reconvening.


Besides, for all its influence over the Friends of Democratic Pakistan, it has failed to persuade them to come out with the expected monetary help.

The result: Islamabad has done more than it could do with its own resources but remains under undue pressure to do more.

For Pakistan as well as the US, it is important that the varied consequences of stretching the military operation to South Waziristan before consolidating the gains in Malakand Division are thoroughly weighed.

If the aim is to put an end to militancy from the area once and for all, the threat in Swat has to be totally removed and the local population properly rehabilitated.

Only then could the common people beyond the valley, who are not in favour of the TTP, feel confident that the authorities are serious in their objective and coming forward with their help.

Privacy Policy © 2006 Nation Multimedia Group 

August 17, 2009 04:02 pm (Thai local time)
www.nationmultimedia.com