

Editorial

How to Lose a War

The crisis of non-proliferation comes to a head in the present scary confrontation with Iran. The kept press in the United States, but sadly, also in Europe, monotonously informs us that the Iranians are in the various stages of preparing to manufacture an arsenal of nuclear weapons. There is no real evidence of this, although it is freely admitted by the Iranian Government that it is determined to pursue the development of nuclear power stations.

President Ahmadinejad, who is not always famous for his temperate statements, has never wavered in one commitment: that Iran has no use for nuclear bombs, and indeed that their use is not consonant with the behaviour of a genuine Muslim. Recently, there was a strong statement by President Khatami, which gently corrected his successor's view of the holocaust, speaking of it as 'a historical reality'. Khatami went on to say, 'We should speak out if even a single Jew is killed. Don't forget that one of the crimes of Hitler, Nazism and German National Socialism was the massacre of innocent people, among them many Jews.' It was, of course, possible for Hitler to massacre millions of people without having at his command the use of a single nuclear bomb. But by contrast it is not possible to use a nuclear bomb without guaranteeing the deaths of very large numbers of people who are completely innocent of any part in any conflict. Iranians are aware of this.

Circumstances alter cases. Not so long ago, Richard B. Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld and President Gerald Ford used all their powerful advocacy to urge upon the Iranian Government the need to buy, from the United States, expensive reprocessing equipment and other facilities for the extraction of plutonium from nuclear reactor fuel. In August 1974, Donald Rumsfeld, soon to become Chief of Staff of the White House, and a member of the President's Cabinet (before he went on to the Secretaryship of Defence from 1975-7), was one of those who endorsed the Iranian plan to build up a substantial nuclear energy industry. He 'also worked hard to complete a multi-billion dollar deal that would have given Tehran control of large quantities of plutonium and enriched uranium – the two pathways to a nuclear bomb'.

Today, the Bush administration claims it to be an axiom of its foreign policy that, almost at any cost, it needs to prevent Iran from achieving exactly those capacities which members of the predecessor administration were encouraging Iran to acquire, thirty years earlier. Of course, the Iran in question was a trusted ally of the United States, ruled by the Shah and his iron-gripped SAVAK Secret Police. Today, the Iranian Government is a valued component of the axis of evil, which should not be allowed to develop as much as a catapult if only the American administration knew how to limit such technology.

The hysteria which greets the civil nuclear programme of Iran marks a culminating moment in the uprooting of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. That Treaty marked a voluntary commitment to renounce nuclear weapons, when an insane Cold War competition seemed to rational men and women all around the world to pose a severe threat to the survival of humanity. Purely voluntarily, nations agreed

to renounce the prospect of the military use of atomic energy. Ultimately, it was agreed, existing nuclear states would follow the same path, forswearing, by mutual agreement, the nuclear arsenals of which they already disposed. This commitment peaked in the year 2000, when the NPT Review process agreed on steps to accomplish this disarmament of existing nuclear powers.

Notwithstanding the agreement, nothing whatever was done to bring it to implementation. Instead, the idea of non-proliferation was subtly replaced by an altogether more sinister concept of *counter*-proliferation. This implies action to disarm proliferators or would-be proliferators. Who will take such action? Why, of course, an existing nuclear power, who will thus be acknowledged to be a universal policeman, although no one has ever proposed it for this role, nominated it to be keeper of the nuclear covenant, or even understood that it was hungering for the task. The counter-proliferators are out in force, barking at the heels of Iran.

In a worthy response to this frenzy, numerous people have raised the question of the Israeli bomb, about which interesting revelations have been coming out of the British Foreign Office, which apparently facilitated its development. According to Mordechai Vanunu, who served many years in prison for revealing the truth about what had been happening while he worked in the Israeli plant at Dimona, the Israelis have been developing thermo-nuclear bombs, and have long held an arsenal of some two hundred 'normal' nukes. The Arab League, and numerous other witnesses, have cogently argued that the West is showing double standards, in leaving the all-too-actual Israeli bomb unchallenged, whilst energetically pursuing the phantom arsenal of Iran. This is very clearly a repetition of the celebrated dodgy dossier, which, the reader may remember, helped take Britain and the United States to war in Iraq, to destroy numerous non-existent weapons of mass destruction.

There is still work for the nuclear researchers to do, in uncovering the precise relationship between Israel and South Africa, in the development of that bomb. Since the early 1980s, there have been repeated allegations that the Israelis had been co-operating with South Africa and Taiwan. In a fog of denials, a number of possible Israeli-South African nuclear explosions were reported in the world's press. Test facilities were alleged to exist in the Kalahari Desert, and three significant explosions were detected in the South Atlantic in December 1980.

The ending of apartheid put an end to the South African bomb, or at any rate, that part of it which did not go home to Israel. But perhaps the South African connection might help to explain why some British civil servants were so keen to help to furnish the Israelis with the wherewithal to complete the only genuine act of nuclear proliferation which has yet unfolded in the Middle East.

Will all the foaming at the mouth about the Iranian bomb lead to new invasions, and new outbreaks of shock and awe? Some Americans appear to think that the Iranians can, with impunity, be punished at arm's length with bunker-busters and so prevented from pursuing the weapons which they say they have never wanted in the first place. This is a very doubtful prospect. If one thing could unite a fairly divided, if not pluralistic, public opinion in Iran, surely it would be visitations from American bombers. There is absolutely no reason why the Iranians should sit

still and allow their tormentors to punish them at will.

We already have some of the predictions about the course of this unlikely war: crude oil at more than one hundred dollars a barrel; the blocking of the Straits of Hormuz, the famous ‘chokepoint’, which can be squeezed to disrupt worldwide oil flows; angry Iraqi Shia pursuit of allied forces. All these and more reprisals are not only feasible, but may be likely if the madcap scheme for the culminating war is not called off or stopped. Of course, sane voices in the United States are telling us all the time that the ground forces do not exist to carry through any new American offensive. Frantic efforts are made to embroil troops from Nato, but these are more likely to backfire than not. It may indeed be Nato itself which is the main victim of such schemes.

There is some evidence that the Bush design for the Middle East might be about to end. Certainly it will end in tears. But what will follow it? Is there no hopeful prospect for the world, or are we to await a succession of grandiose onslaughts, as this most extraordinary military power seeks to substitute bombs for brains. If we could give brains a chance, might it not be possible also to give peace a chance?

Ken Coates

IAEA says no evidence of Iranian nuclear weapons plan

DUBAI: As the countdown for a crucial meeting on Iran on March 6 gets under way, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has revealed that it has not found any evidence that Tehran had diverted material towards making atomic weapons. In its report which has been circulated to its 35 board members, the IAEA said that its three years of investigations had not shown ‘any diversion of nuclear material to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices’, the Associated Press reported. However, it called upon Iran to substantially increase its cooperation with the IAEA inspectors as the agency has not been able ‘to conclude that there are no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in Iran.’

Without heightened cooperation, the agency would be unable to establish whether some of Iran’s past nuclear activities under wraps were not linked to the manufacture of nuclear weapons. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki who has been visiting Japan said, ‘They (IAEA) could not find evidence which shows that Iran has diverted from its peaceful purposes of nuclear activities in Iran.’

On February 4, the board had decided to report Iran’s case to the UN Security Council, which can take action against Iran, including the imposition of economic sanctions. Buoyed by the report, Iran is rushing the head of its Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Larijani to Russia for another round of talks. A Russian delegation led by Sergei Kiriyenko held talks with Iran over the weekend. These discussions had revolved around the establishment of a joint venture facility in Russia, which would produce enriched uranium for generating electricity. That meeting produced an ‘agreement in principle’ on this subject.

However, later, differences appear to have surfaced on another issue – on whether Iran would be allowed to operate a small-scale enrichment plant for research purposes. The IAEA report said that Iran had begun enrichment using 10 centrifuges – a move which can result in the production of only minute quantities of enriched uranium.

Atul Aneja, The Hindu, 1 March 2006