

Editorial

Haditha Ethics – from Iraq to Iran?

For his religion, it was fit
 To match his learning and his wit:
 'Twas Presbyterian true blue;
 For he was of that stubborn crew
 Of errant Saints, whom all men grant
 To be the true Church Militant;
 Such as do build their faith upon
 The holy text of pike and gun;
 Decide all controversies by
 Infallible artillery;
 And prove their doctrine orthodox
 By apostolic blows and knocks;

Samuel Butler from **Hudibras**

The slaughter in Haditha, in which American marines ran amok after the death of a colleague in a roadside bombing, has engendered a flurry of allegations, denials and apologies. General Peter Chiarelli, the commander of the Multinational Corps in Iraq, has announced a crash programme of ethical training for allied forces on battlefield conduct. The General has not yet resolved the problem of ethical instruction for commanders-in-chief or their acolytes.

While the press has wondered about how many other Hadithas have afflicted Iraq, many curious citizens have been wondering whether the military ethics of Haditha are about to be re-tested on a wider scale, in an even more pointless war in Iran.

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‘We are committed to keeping the world’s most dangerous weapons out of the hands of the world’s most dangerous people.’

President Bush is evidently fond of this motto, because in March 2006, it has once again appeared prominently: this time in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America. It is not, as you might think, an engagement by the Americans to renounce their titanic nuclear stockpile. It is, instead, a commitment to sustaining their monopoly, and closing off any possibility to challenge that monopoly.

‘Our strategy focuses on controlling fissile material with two priority objectives: first, to keep States from acquiring the capability to produce fissile material suitable for making nuclear weapons; and second, to deter, interdict or prevent any transfer of that material from States that have this capability to rogue States or to terrorists.’

It is in this context that the United States initiated, in April 2004, Security Council Resolution 1540, ‘requiring Nations to criminalise WMD proliferation and

institute effective export and financial controls'. This motion, to the extent that it will be enforced, would quietly annul the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which represented a voluntary commitment by Member-states to forswear nuclear armaments.

It is not necessary here to reiterate the all-important distinction between a voluntary Non-Proliferation Treaty, and a chapter 7 counter-proliferation law. But laws require agencies for enforcement. These could not be legally established by the Security Council, but would require a decision by the UN General Assembly. The National Security Strategy of the United States does not wish to elucidate the finer points of this problem, and it prefers instead to talk about working 'with the international community'.

But what is this international community? Certainly it is not the General Assembly of the United Nations, which is clearly not wanted on this voyage. Sometimes it is a very small community indeed, consisting of George Bush and a handful of acolytes led by Tony Blair. Interestingly, Mr. Blair is now being nominated by the Murdoch press to take over the entire responsibility for running the United Nations as its new Secretary General. In this way, the neo-cons would wish to kill two birds with one deft blow from a single stone. They will thus guarantee total subordination to the precepts of American security strategy, and, in short order, the abolition of the United Nations as any kind of effective agency.

The international community embarked upon its war with Iraq with a motley crew of belligerents. Year by year, one by one, these crusaders have fallen by the wayside. Since they have never been mobilised through the machinery of the United Nations, they have been conveniently beyond its influence. But it has been quite inconvenient that the consequence of this *ad hoc* machinery has been a distinctly *ad hoc* financial settlement, which has made it quite difficult to fund the American projects for which it has been established.

'The administration has worked with the international community in confronting nuclear proliferation.

We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran.'

Another inestimable advantage of a community without boundaries or agreed membership is that it becomes much easier to change its objectives, and refine its targeting. Yesterday, bits of it had no greater challenge than North Korea. A little earlier, the most dreadful enemy was Saddam Hussein. Today the United States

'has joined with our EU partners and Russia to pressure Iran to meet its international obligations, and provide objective guarantees that its nuclear programme is only for peaceful purposes. This diplomatic effort must succeed if confrontation is to be avoided.'

This international community numbers three important partners, each of which might doubtless be able to recruit assistance from various satellites. But the partners do not agree on parts of the American prospectus.

‘The Iranian regime sponsors terrorism; threatens Israel; seeks to thwart Middle East peace; disrupts democracy in Iraq; and denies the aspirations of its people for freedom. The nuclear issue and our other concerns can ultimately be resolved only if the Iranian regime makes the strategic decision to change these policies, open up its political system and afford freedom to its people. This is the ultimate goal of US policy.’

In a word, the United States can only rid itself of non-existent Iranian bombs, and non-existent Iranian threats, if its (captive?) international community buys into the need for regime change. But one more regime change like the one in Iraq, and the Middle East will be swallowed up in flames from the Mediterranean seaboard across to the Gulf. This must be increasingly apparent even to the international pseudo-community.

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But, fortunately, there is another international community.

The largest group of countries associated with the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, made a statement on the nuclear questions surrounding the Islamic Republic of Iran on 30th May 2006. The Foreign Ministers, meeting at Putrajaya in Malaysia, issued a nine-point statement, which unambiguously defended Iran’s right to develop, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, unanimously agreed upon Israel to accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and supported the call for a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the whole area of the Middle East.

There are one hundred and sixteen members of the Non-Aligned Movement, which implies that, whatever manoeuvres may take place on the Security Council of the United Nations, threats against Iran could very likely all be overruled when the one hundred and sixteen stepped forward in the General Assembly, if matters came to a head. Here, we quote the Non-Aligned Movement resolution in full.

Statement on the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Nuclear Issue

1. The Ministers *reiterated* their principled positions on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation reflected in the Final Document of the Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 27th to 30th May 2006. They *considered* the developments regarding the implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
2. The Ministers *reaffirmed* the basic and inalienable right of all States, to develop research, production and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, without any discrimination and in conformity with their respective legal obligations. Therefore, nothing should be interpreted in a way as inhibiting or restricting this right of States to develop atomic energy for peaceful purposes. They *furthermore reaffirmed* that States’ choices and decisions in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear technology and its fuel cycle policies must be respected.
3. The Ministers *recognised* the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as the sole competent authority for verification of the respective safeguards

- obligations of Member States and *stressed* that there should be no undue pressure or interference in the Agency's activities, especially its verification process, which would jeopardise the efficiency and credibility of the Agency.
4. The Ministers *welcomed* the cooperation extended by the Islamic Republic of Iran to the IAEA including those voluntary confidence-building measures undertaken, with a view to resolve the remaining issues. They *noted* the assessment of the IAEA Director-General that all nuclear material declared by Iran had been accounted for. They *noted*, at the same time, that the process for drawing a conclusion with regard to the absence of undeclared material and activities in Iran is an ongoing and time-consuming process. In this regard, the Ministers *encouraged* Iran to urgently continue to cooperate actively and fully with the IAEA within the Agency's mandate to resolve outstanding issues in order to promote confidence and a peaceful resolution of the issue.
 5. The Ministers *emphasised* the fundamental distinction between the legal obligations of States to their respective safeguards agreements and any confidence building measures voluntarily undertaken to resolve difficult issues, and *believed* that such voluntary undertakings are not legal safeguards obligations.
 6. The Ministers *considered* the establishment of nuclear-weapons-free zones (NWFZs) as a positive step towards attaining the objective of global nuclear disarmament and reiterated the support for the establishment in the Middle East of a nuclear-weapons-free zone, in accordance with relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Pending the establishment of such a zone, they *demand*ed Israel to accede to the NPT without delay and place promptly all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards.
 7. The Ministers *reaffirmed* the inviolability of peaceful nuclear activities and that any attack or threat of attack against peaceful nuclear facilities – operational or under construction – poses a great danger to human beings and the environment, and constitutes a grave violation of international law, principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and regulations of the IAEA. They *recognised* the need for a comprehensive multilaterally negotiated instrument, prohibiting attacks, or threat of attacks on nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
 8. The Ministers *strongly believed* that all issues on safeguards and verification, including those of Iran, should be resolved within the IAEA framework, and be based on technical and legal grounds. They *further emphasised* that the Agency should continue its work to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue within its mandate under the Statute of the IAEA.
 9. The Ministers *also strongly believed* that diplomacy and dialogue through peaceful means must continue to find a long-term solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. They *expressed* their conviction that the only way to resolve the issue is to resume negotiations without any preconditions and to enhance cooperation with the involvement of all necessary parties to promote international confidence with the view to facilitating Agency's work on resolving the outstanding issues.

Doubtless this decision would not be without influence immediately afterwards when the United States announced its decision, after long years of total ostracism, to seek talks with Iran on its nuclear programme.

President Bush and Condoleezza Rice, announcing the bid for such talks, proclaimed at the same time their insistence on a number of ‘concessions’ by the Republic of Iran. Ms. Rice claimed that there was now ‘a substantial agreement’ about the choice faced by Iran. ‘It is time to know whether Iran is serious about negotiation or not’, she said. However the message from the Non-Aligned Movement conveys a real, not imaginary, ‘substantial agreement’ between the overwhelming majority of the members of the United Nations. But this is not the one that Ms. Rice wished to hear.

On the same day, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed El Baradei, issued a statement to the effect that ‘Iran does not represent an “immediate” nuclear threat’. Mr. El Baradei also said that he believed the Iranian authorities were ‘willing to negotiate’.

In the post-Cold War age of Full Spectrum Dominance, in which there is allegedly only one superpower, it has hitherto seemed far too rude for those outside the charmed circle of public power to remember the days when great American leaders were once described as ‘paper tigers’. But, for all their ferocious near-monopoly of unspeakable weapons of mass destruction, doesn’t the noise of George Bush, to say nothing of that of his henchman in Downing Street, sound distinctly thin, more like a rustle than a roar?

Ken Coates

‘Wiped off the map?’

‘Ask anyone in Washington, London or Tel Aviv if they can cite any phrase uttered by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the chances are high they will say he wants Israel “wiped off the map” ... The remarks are not out of context. They are wrong, pure and simple. Ahmadinejad never said them. Farsi speakers have pointed out that he was mistranslated. The Iranian president was quoting an ancient statement by Iran’s first Islamist leader, the late Ayatollah Khomeini, that “this regime occupying Jerusalem must vanish from the page of time” just as the Shah’s regime in Iran had vanished. He was not making a military threat. He was calling for an end to the occupation of Jerusalem at some point in the future. The “page of time” phrase suggests he did not expect it to happen soon. There was no implication that either Khomeini, when he first made the statement, or Ahmadinejad, in repeating it, felt it was imminent, or that Iran would be involved in bringing it about.’

Jonathan Steele, *The Guardian*, 2 June 2006