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IRAN – AN INTERVIEW

Ken Coates interviewed by K. Kia. A journalist from Fars Press in Iran sent some questions, which are printed in italic type. Ken Coates' replies are in ordinary type.

How does the achievement of uranium enrichment by Iran affect the regional and global arrangements?

Well, if men were normally rational creatures, it would not have any very marked effect. The effect that it does have is based on the wholly unjustified assumption that Iran is moving closer to the capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons. Repeated denials by the Iranian authorities are scarcely reported in the West, and obviously largely ignored.

It was not always like this. In the days of the Shah, there were strenuous efforts by the American Government to encourage Iran along the nuclear path. But that was a different Iran. Today, it is clear that the central thrust of the present criticisms of the Iranian administration is closely mixed with hysteria. A non-hysterical response would seek to recover the initiative for the creation of a nuclear-free zone throughout the Middle East, including Iran, for sure, but also including Israel, which is the key proliferator in the region, disposing, it is widely admitted, of some two hundred nuclear warheads, including an arsenal of thermonuclear bombs.

If a peaceful solution to nuclear proliferation were sought, surely it would be difficult to achieve. But public opinion would find the argument compelling, and that is the beginning of wisdom.

What changes will be caused by these effects?

A variety of warlike noises is being 'justified' by the Iranian scientific advances. None of them can rest on honest argument. The result is a whole range of harmful changes, undermining the peace of the region. If we seek beneficial change, then surely it is high time to develop an extensive and inclusive campaign to realise a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East, by mutual agreement. This should not only prohibit, by consent, the manufacture of nuclear weapons by all participant states,

but it should also prohibit the deployment of nuclear weapons by external nuclear powers, for purposes of intimidation and threats.

How should Americans respond to Iran's new nuclear status?

A rational response would require a move away from reliance on nuclear weapons by the Americans themselves, and by other existing nuclear powers. The Non-Proliferation Treaty, properly interpreted, includes the commitment by nuclear powers themselves to embark upon a thoroughgoing process of nuclear disarmament. Although specific measures in this direction were agreed at the beginning of the Millennium, they have not been implemented, nor even has their implementation begun, however tentatively. It is this which has put the Non-Proliferation Treaty in jeopardy.

In the beginning it was seen as a means of affording security to non-nuclear nations. Now it is seen instead as a means of policing the non-nuclear powers by the nuclear ones. In particular, one nuclear power has assigned to itself the role of universal judge, jury and guardian. If the NPT is to be safeguarded, its status as a voluntary association should be maintained and developed.

The American and other client administrations have been deliberately changing the phraseology of non-proliferation. Today, they commonly speak of *counter*-proliferation measures, which imply the use of various kinds of force to prevent proliferation. But the Non-Proliferation Treaty established no such institutions, which have no democratic sanction, and no diplomatic validity. The NPT, I repeat, was a voluntary engagement for those who possessed nuclear weapons to negotiate comprehensive disarmament measures. It is clear that present rhetoric on proliferation has been profoundly contaminated by hypocrisy, and that those who genuinely seek to prevent nuclear proliferation must recover an impartial respect for the relevant Treaties and maintain their opposition to all nuclear weapons whatsoever.

DIEGO GARCIA: COURT VICTORY ON RIGHT TO RETURN

*In Spokesman 81, Lindsey Collen and Ragini Kistnasamy reported how the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia was stolen from its residents by the British and leased to the United States for the construction of a strategic military base that was crucial to the conduct of the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, their campaigning group Lalit (*www.lalitmauritius.com*) has sent this report of the latest victory in the long campaign for the islanders' right to return.*

On 11 May 2006, the inhabitants of Diego Garcia and the other islands of the Chagos Archipelago won their Court Case in the High Court in London for the right to return to their islands. They were forcibly removed in the 1960s and 1970s

by the British, who illegally stole the islands, and rented them to the US Armed Forces for one of their largest military bases.

For the first time in British history, the Queen of England's signing of 'Orders in Council' has been overturned. These decrees take place behind the back of Parliament. Two Orders in Council in the year 2004 banned inhabitants of the Islands from returning, following an earlier court judgment in 2000 granting the right to return.

The inhabitants were forcibly removed to make way for the base, and the islands were separated from the rest of the Mauritius Islands. Lalit has for 30 years been running ongoing campaigns for the right to return plus reparations, for the closing down of the military base, and for the re-unification of Mauritius, through the decolonisation of what is called the 'British Indian Ocean Territories'.

IRAQ: 50,000 US TROOPS TO STAY 'FOR MANY YEARS'

There has been a lot of speculation about permanent American bases in Iraq. Francis Harris contributed this interesting perception to the Daily Telegraph on 12 June 2006.

'America plans to retain a garrison of 50,000 troops, one tenth of its entire army, in Iraq for years to come, according to US media reports ... But despite fierce domestic pressure to reduce troop levels before November's critical mid-term elections, there were growing signals that General George Casey, America's Iraq commander, may raise troop levels in the short-term. Mr Bush said in his weekend radio address that 'violence in Iraq may escalate' as terrorists tried to prove that they had survived the loss of their leader [Abu Musab al-Zarqawi]. American commanders are also worried by the situation in the Sunni areas at the heart of the insurgency, where American units have complained of a shortage of men ...

General Casey has already summoned his main reserve unit, a 3,500-man armoured brigade based in Kuwait, and has alerted a Germany-based brigade that it may be needed soon. Military planners have begun to assess the costs of keeping a 50,000-man force in Iraq for a protracted period of time. At present the total number of serving American troops is about 500,000. The plan has not yet received presidential approval. But it would fit with the administration's belief that while troops numbers will fall, American forces will have to remain in Iraq beyond Mr Bush's departure from the White House in early 2009.

Military analysts have noted that significant American spending is already being committed to permanent bases in Iraq. They say Iraq's military may soon be able to fight by itself, but it cannot feed or supply itself and it has no air force to speak of ...'

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN: HOW MANY DYING?

Dr Gideon Polya has published some 130 works over four decades, most recently a major pharmacological reference text Biochemical Targets of Plant Bioactive Compounds (CRC Press/Taylor & Francis, New York & London, 2003), and is currently writing a book on global mortality. He is a contributing editor to Media With Conscience News Magazine (www.mwcnews.net), where a longer version of this article may be found.

Avoidable mortality (technically, excess mortality) is the difference between the actual mortality in a country and the mortality expected for a peaceful, well-run country with the same demographics (that is, with the same birth rate and the same population age profile). Avoidable mortality is a fundamental parameter to be considered in any sensible discussion of human affairs –- it is the bottom-line issue when assessing the success or otherwise of societal, regional and global policies.

Today, mainstream media are comprehensively ignoring the horrendous magnitude of the avoidable post-invasion deaths in Occupied Iraq and Afghanistan (presently totalling 2.3 million deaths) and the avoidable deaths in the First World-dominated non-European World (presently 14.8 million deaths each year).

Several years ago, as a humanist scientist interested in the fundamental problem of human mortality, I set out to determine 'avoidable mortality' for every country in the world since 1950, using publicly-accessible data from the UN Population Division.

The population, death rate, birth rate, under-5 infant mortality rate and other demographic statistics from the UN go back to 1950, a time when all the world potentially had access to the life-preserving basics such as universal literacy, a tolerable per capita income, antibiotics, anti-malarials, mosquito netting, soap, antiseptics, clean water, sanitation, some basic immunisations, basic health care and preventative medicine.

My approach was to graphically estimate base-line values of 'expected mortality rates' for all countries of the world (a very complicated process). Having this information it was possible to determine 'avoidable mortality rates' and thence 'avoidable mortality' for every country in the world since 1950. The post-1950 avoidable mortality totalled 1.3 billion for the world, 1.25 billion for the non-European world and about 0.6 billion for the Muslim world.

These numbers were so horrendous that they demanded some sort of independent corroboration. I achieved this by independently calculating the 'under-5 infant mortality' for every country in the world since 1950. This process, based on UN infant mortality data, involved no complicated 'base-line' estimates – the calculations simply involved straightforward arithmetic.

The post-1950 'under-5 infant mortality' has totalled 0.88 billion for the world, 0.85 billion for the non-European world and about 0.4 billion for the Muslim world. Further, comparisons with First World countries (which all have very low infant mortality rates) revealed that for Third World countries about 90% of 'under-5 infant mortality' has been 'avoidable'.

A very important number derived from this analysis is that for the non-European world 'post-1950 under-5 infant mortality' has been numerically about 0.7 of the 'post-1950 avoidable mortality'. This has the important operational consequence that if you know the 'under-5 infant mortality' for a high mortality country, simply dividing by 0.7 will give you a rough idea of the 'avoidable mortality' (remembering that the 'highly technical' estimation of 'avoidable mortality' described above is arduous and involves some complicated assumptions).

Over the last few years I have been performing thousands of calculations relating to avoidable mortality and writing a huge book on the subject. However, I have also taken a lot of time trying to tell the world about this appalling continuing catastrophe – following the example of Continental Europeans who tried to tell an unresponsive world about the expanding Jewish Holocaust about 60-65 years ago.

In particular, over the last two years I have reported the steadily increasing post-invasion avoidable mortality and under-5 infant mortality in Occupied Iraq and Afghanistan that now total 2.3 million and 1.8 million, respectively. Every day 1,300 under-5 year old infants die in Occupied Iraq and Afghanistan (1,200 avoidably) and 29,000 under-5 year old infants die in the non-European World (26,000 avoidably).

Under-5 infant mortality figures are presented in updated UNICEF reports for essentially every country in the world. For Iraq and Afghanistan they tell us the following: in 2004, the under-5 infant mortality was 122,000 in Occupied Iraq, 359,000 in Occupied Afghanistan, and 1,000 in the occupying country Australia (noting that in 2004 the populations of these countries were 28.1 million, 28.6 million and 19.9 million, respectively).

From this data, assuming that the figures have been roughly the same each year after invasion (they have actually got worse) we can readily estimate that the post-invasion under-5 infant mortality in Occupied Iraq over *three years* has been 122,000 x 3 = 366,000 and that in Occupied Afghanistan over *four years* has been 359,000 x 4 = 1,436,000 i.e. a total of 1,802,000 [as compared to my 'highly technical' calculation of 1.8 million].

Assuming for 'bad outcome' Third World countries that 'under-5 infant mortality' is numerically about 0.7 of the 'avoidable mortality', we can estimate that the post-invasion avoidable mortality in Occupied Iraq and Afghanistan = 1,802,000/0.7 = 2.6 million [as compared to my 'highly technical' calculation of 2.3 million].

Similarly, the post-invasion 'avoidable mortality' can be estimated roughly to be 366,000/0.7 = 0.5 million for Occupied Iraq and 1,436,000/0.7 = 2.1 million for Occupied Afghanistan [as compared to my 'highly technical' estimates of 0.5 million and 1.8 million, respectively).

The 'easy, layperson-friendly way' yields essentially the same results for post-invasion avoidable mortality in Occupied Iraq and Afghanistan as my 'careful, highly technical, precise method' based on UN Population Division data. It must be noted that this 'easy, layperson-friendly' approximate approach is only valid for 'bad outcome non-European countries' - but then these are the countries we are

interested in from an urgent, humanitarian perspective ('avoidable mortality' as conservatively measured by me is zero or essentially zero in other countries - even the unusually elevated 'avoidable mortality' in Hungary, which is among the countries in the world with the lowest infant mortality, 'only' accounts for 35,000 Hungarians each year).

Gideon Polya