



IRAN

a crisis about nuclear fuel or a crisis of dialogue & participation?



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Abstract

This presentation is based on a Humanitad Open letter to our International Leaders that I wrote in February 2006 when the current crisis surrounding Iran's nuclear fuel programme began to gather momentum.

I want to advocate that we put the issue of Iran's fuel enrichment programme in to the wider context of environmental security on the one hand, and the need for truly international participation in making decisions about our shared future, on the other

This means opening up much more informed dialogue about what expertise currently under-represented groups and countries could, want and should contribute to global solutions from the breadth and depth of their own geographic, historic, cultural, spiritual and political experience.

We impoverish the repertoire of solutions to global problems if we do not seek the full engagement of partners such as Iran in our international decision making fora. This must include a leading role in improving the regulatory framework of the IAEA so that it has the mandate and the authority to enforce conformity to standards of international security.

Unless we seriously improve the quality of dialogue between global partners in the West and East and the North and the South so as to reduce the current climate of fear we will not achieve the global cooperation

needed to tackle the global challenges we are facing in the 21st century.

THE NUCLEAR FUEL DEBATE IN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

Debates about environmental security need to address our growing concern about climate change as the motor for future political conflict, as resources become scarce within certain geographical boundaries and environmental disasters overwhelm people in different parts of the world. Iran's fuel programme needs to be seen in this context.

We still do not involve all people in the structures and processes designed to address global problems, but all too often endeavour to set agendas for people concerning issues in which they should in fact take the lead. Despite the D 8, ASEAN, the African Union and other such Eastern and Southern decision making fora, there still is no properly balanced system (not even within the United Nations) for achieving truly international participation that includes partners from all four corners of our world. As professor Mojtahedzadeh of Tehran's Tarbiat Modaress University has pointed out many times, even within such regional fora such as the D 8, there is no proper mechanism for ensuring joint working. Similarly, as the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and his chancellor, Gordon Brown, recently recognized, following up on the implementation of the Commission for Africa report and the UK's EU pres-



identity of the G8 and its impact on the African Union, many of these regional bodies are themselves not properly represented and engaged in the larger international structures which regulate at the global level arrangements that impact on regional and national issues, such as the WTO, IMF or World Bank.

In addition, there is still no real understanding in the West and in the North of the cultural wealth of the East and the South and its importance for rethinking global problems which are currently formulated by drawing predominantly on Western and Northern traditions of thought and inquiry, leading, by the same token, to a very restricted and impoverished repertoire of envisaged solutions. Iran plays a pivotal role in international security and it needs to be involved as a full partner in all relevant regional and international endeavours.

I urge everyone who is committed to tackling the fundamental issues that face the global community today to work together to open up the space for widening the public debate concerning security sector reform. There is increasing recognition that in order to meet the security needs of individual countries we require regional and global co-operation in improving food security, disaster relief, environmental protection, economic development, governance and civil society involvement. As is very clear right now in sub Saharan Africa, both problems and solutions, transcend the boundaries both between countries and between disciplines. Brigadier Michael Harbottle made a whole-systems-perspective the cornerstone of the Centre for International Peacebuilding, which he and his wife Eirwen founded in 1982. In 1992 he set out a modernization agenda for the military of the twenty first century advocating that it is time to shift the balance of responsibilities towards peacekeeping and peacebuilding by helping to create the conditions for viable governance through proactive international involvement in state building and environmental protection.

Without economic and environmental sustainability there can be no security. We need everyone to participate in finding new and sustainable ways to meet our resource needs. We need to work together to build healthy societies by transcending the politically drawn dividing lines between East and West, North and South. We need to restructure the UN to enable proper dialogue and cooperation between all nations and all peoples.

There is little doubt that climate change is fast becoming the greatest threat to global security. Now is the time to engage in inclusive multi-sector and multi-lateral cooperation to research how we may save our planet Earth rather than destroy it. Despite the commitment to nuclear disarmament, the North and West is not giving up

its nuclear weapons even though this commitment was the basis for motivating all nations not already in possession of nuclear arms to sign the Non Proliferation Treaty, giving away their right to develop nuclear weapons in the future.

In view of the military intervention in the internal affairs of Iraq, the peoples of the East and the South do not experience the existence of nuclear weapons in the North and the West as a deterrent against nuclear escalation and hence as the intended guarantor of global security. Rather, they experience the continued presence of nuclear weapons in the North and the West as a threat to their own security. Iran as Iraq's immediate neighbour has reason to feel particularly under threat by the West, especially in view of much White House rhetoric indicting Iran as part of the 'axis of evil'.

At the same time the West and the North feel under threat in light of President Ahmadinejad's objection to the Israeli occupation of Palestine which was widely reported in the Western media as a direct threat to wipe Israel off the map.

Hassan Rohani, representative of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameini, on the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) and Iran's former top nuclear negotiator wrote on 9 May 2006 in Time magazine: "A nuclear weaponized Iran destabilizes the region, prompts a regional arms race, and wastes the scarce resources in the region. And taking account of U.S. nuclear arsenal and its policy of ensuring a strategic edge for Israel, an Iranian bomb will accord Iran no security dividends. There are also some Islamic and developmental reasons why Iran as an Islamic and developing state must not develop and use weapons of mass destruction".

Much of the debate in the North and the West is fuelled by concerns about the long term future of fossil fuel production as well as the long term environmental sustainability of fossil fuel energy. There are economic as well as moral issues involved here, and they do not always work in the same direction. However, from this perspective, Iran is legitimately concerned about how it is to meet the energy needs of seventy million Iranian people in ways that guarantee the environmental and economic security of the country and its people. On current projections, Iran's energy needs cannot be met adequately and sustainably by the country's own fossil fuel reserves, especially if some of their supplies go to India and China in return for essential goods and services. The long term hostility of the West and the North to the Iranian government and the threat of further sanctions only reinforce Iran's endeavours towards self sufficiency wherever possible. The determination to be self sufficient is also the basis for Iran's resistance to accept the current proposals of providing nuclear fuel capacity outside



its borders and for privileging its independence over any trade benefits that might be granted by the European Union.

With the proviso that we do find any satisfactory answers to how we might safely dispose of nuclear waste, public debate in the North and the West revolves around the potential of nuclear power to make savings in carbon emissions and thus to halt climate change. If nuclear energy could really be the clean renewable fuel of the future, as the British prime minister Tony Blair seems now to advocate, it would be a tragedy to encourage developing countries in the South and the East to continue to meet the energy needs of their own fast growing economies and populations solely with conventional fuels. Unless we find a global accord where every nation is encouraged to curb their carbon emissions, climate change will accelerate the deterioration of our habitats and the constriction of biodiversity across species at an alarming rate. This concern is beginning to inform policy decisions with respect to the African continent, but this really needs to be a global debate involving all countries and especially the oil producing countries in the Middle East and beyond. Iran is in a unique position, historically, geographically, culturally and economically to make a significant contribution to this global debate, as has been pointed out on many occasions by our host, Ali Rastbein, president of IISS.

Under current regulations it is, in fact, lawful, under Article IV of the Non Proliferation Treaty for Iran to develop a nuclear power programme, provided the agreed International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) safeguards are in place. As it stands, the IAEA rules do not preclude the attainment of a level of nuclear capability which enables the building of nuclear weapons. It is entirely unclear on what legal rather than political grounds the North and the West are singling out Iran for a ban on developing a nuclear programme, especially if this programme is expressly earmarked for ecologically responsible energy production.

As Hassan Rohani has pointed out: "Three years of robust inspection of Iranian nuclear and non-nuclear facilities by the IAEA inspectors led Dr. El-Baradai to conclude and certify that to date there are no indications of any diversion of nuclear material and activities toward making a bomb. At the same time, El-Baradai has pointed out that the IAEA cannot certify that Iran's program is exclusively peaceful. But the fact is that few among many states with a nuclear program have received such a clean bill of health from the IAEA. Such certification by the IAEA does and should take time and effort. Iran is prepared and willing to invest the time and effort necessary to receive the IAEA clean bill of health. The IAEA is also ready to pursue its investigation of Iran's nuclear activities. So should the

states that have concern about it."

The current political war of words, far from serving to improve global security by trying to enforce a ban, is escalating a deadly game of promoting fear on all sides, inevitably inflaming a conflict in which all sides fear to lose face, especially vis-à-vis their respective electorates or subjects. It would be a much clearer political message if the key actors in this conflict were to take the lead in a truly international initiative to re-examine the current agreements enshrined in the Non Proliferation Treaty. We need a new 'coalition of the willing' to set out a clear roadmap for:

- 1 *phasing out existing nuclear weapons*
- 2 *committing not to build new nuclear weapons and formulating and implementing a more explicit contractual agreement which prevents break-out from the NPT*
- 3 *co-operating in researching safe and sustainable renewable energy which includes nuclear energy production for economic use*
- 4 *extending the existing IAEA regulatory framework to set clear IAEA guidelines for regulating the scope and timing of industrial-scale reactor grade uranium enrichment programmes for all member states which specifies an explicit IAEA verifiable cap, limiting the production of UF₆ - uranium hexa fluoride*
- 5 *firming up on a globally acceptable Kyoto agreement to which all governments are duty bound to sign up perhaps enforced by a UN Security Council Resolution*
- 6 *tying this agenda to proposals for funding the delivery of the Millennium Development Goals*
- 7 *setting up an international forum in which all countries with sensitive fuel cycle programs work together to close the loopholes in the non-proliferation system and to developing a technically credible international control regime. This might include developing an additional protocol, which regulates the terms for unannounced on-site spot inspections*

Iran should be an active and welcome partner in such an enterprise. As Hassan Rohani wrote, "Iran's readiness to welcome other countries to partner with Iran in a consortium provides additional assurance about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program".

The current international conflict surrounding the wish of the Iranian government to develop a nuclear



fuel capacity needs to be seen in the context of this much wider debate.

THE NUCLEAR FUEL DEBATE IN THE CONTEXT OF A CRISIS OF COMMUNICATION

We are facing an impasse which is to a great extent exacerbated by a serious failure in communication with the Iranian government, compounded but the even more serious failure to engage in proper dialogue with the Iranian people, and, indeed, with civil society in Muslim countries in general.

The Huntingtonian rhetoric, proclaiming that we are embroiled in a 'clash of civilizations', is both dangerous and misguided. It invites us into the trap of 'black and white', 'us and them' thinking, rather than opening a space for sustained and serious, truly inclusive, international dialogue about differences between nations, cultures, economic lobbies, ethnic groups, generations and the sexes. We need to engage in vigorous and rigorous as well as compassionate dialogue about the inevitable conflicts between vision and values within and between all sectors of society, locally, nationally and internationally, leading to complex conflicts between strategic objectives, mission statements and operational implementation plans. Such differences in value driven priorities also interact with how societies set up systems of governance, wealth creation and distribution. Don Beck and Chris Cowan have developed a scale of eight different value systems, called Spiral Dynamics in order to help conflict actors to map differences relating to incompatible value systems. Don Beck has also formulated the concept of "stratified democracies" in order to describe transitional governance arrangements for countries which are moving from dictatorships through single party systems to wards representative democracies or other forms of multi-stakeholder forms of governance. As professor Hall Gardner put it in a lecture in Paris last December (not concerning Iran, but the events at Banlieu), we are facing a global "structural and economic crisis relating to lack of social and economic opportunities for a number of social and ethnic groups". We need to respond to this crisis by involving all relevant international political, social, religious, military and economic fora, which, together with the UN, have been created to develop ever more democratic forms of governance, capable of negotiating local, national and international conflicts by peaceful means wherever and whenever this is at all possible.

We are facing major decisions that affect all of us and the survival of our planet and we must take these decisions together as one human family, however many conflicts we may have to transcend along the way. All societies, not just developing societies in the East and in the South, struggle to meet human needs and to respect human

rights. In many countries in the South and the East, where arrangements for citizen participation in decision making may not conform to Western models of representative democracy, there are nonetheless lively discussions within civil society about identity and gender, economics and social justice, health and education and issues of governance in general. Iran is no exception.

Iranians, engage with the arguments of post modernism and Western philosophy, sociology, political science and so forth. They debate the pros and cons of the concept and the institution of democracy and its relationship to Islam; they worry about gender inequalities, issues of post modern identity, labor relations and wealth creation. There is a thriving scientific community and Iranians have many times expressed a great desire for playing their part in scientific, technological and cultural cooperation at an international level. They do so in ways from which we, in the West, could, and should learn. Many of these writings are published in English (see *Bahmanpur, MS & Bashir, H (2000) Muslim Identity in the 21st Century, Institute of Islamic Studies, London, to name one, or the work done by the Khomeini Institute in Qom, for instance by the political philosopher Mohammed Legenhausen*).

For every five Iranian households one person is either already a graduate or currently engaged in higher education. On average, every Iranian village has between 2 and 3 graduates, and the level of illiteracy in women has dropped from 30 percent to 12 percent in the sixteen years between 1980 and 1996 (male illiteracy is only 8 percent) (Hadi Khaniki, 2000, Department of Communication, Allamah Tabataba University, Iran- in Bahmanpur, op.cit). Women teach in universities and hold political office and many women from rural and working class backgrounds are now literate and employed.

It is tragic that the Western media representation of Iran does little to counteract an image of Iran as the home of bearded Muslim fanatics and women in burkas, or at best, as the source of saffron, pistachios, and oriental rugs, the site of the blue mosque, and the birthplace of the medieval Sufi poets, of whom Jallaluddin Rumi has become a household name.

Of course, Iran has its own share of the problems that face most modern and modernizing societies such as unemployment due to educated young people joining the labour market at a greater rate than the economy can expand, disputes between employers and trade unions, drug and sexual health issues, disengagement, dissatisfaction and crime. Yes, there are concerns about the limits to the freedom of speech, and indeed the first FPA recipient of the "Dialogue of Cultures Award", the Iranian investigative journalist Akbar Ganji has been in prison for



nearly six years for his openly critical writings (thankfully, he was released this spring. Some of those less fortunate were executed or went into exile). However Iranians are looking for ways of tackling these problems just as energetically as people do elsewhere, for example, Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian nobel peace prize winner of 2003, who lives and works in Tehran.

Many Iranians are involved in NGOs, some of which are in receipt of international recognition as world leaders in their field, such as The Ladies Charitable Society (LCS) with 2,000 dedicated members and volunteers inside Iran and overseas, with branches established in London, Los Angeles, San Jose, Seattle, and Toronto. LCS has pioneered the work of the Kahrizak Charity Foundation (KCF), a private, non-governmental, charitable organization, which operates the Kahrizak Center for Living, Education and Rehabilitation of the Disabled and the Elderly, a 1600-bed, 400,000-square meter, state-of-the-art center, the like of which may not exist anywhere else in the world. It also pioneers an imaginative community support system for educating and caring for over a thousand children orphaned in the last two earthquakes.

We must stop demonizing and romanticizing the people of Iran, who are by and large every bit as curious and modern as we are, just as much concerned to open educational and economic opportunities for those of their citizens who have for historic reasons had fewer opportunities to thrive and develop. Iranians are just as passionate to make the world a better place, and just as easily angered as people in the West when their convictions or beliefs are threatened.

In time, I hope we will learn the art of non violent communication, but for now we need to contain and strive to prevent extreme and extremist forms of protest everywhere. Whether in Iran or Ethiopia, in the UK or the Ukraine, dissenters put themselves at risk and may suffer human rights abuses. The UN Declaration of Human Rights, the International Criminal Court, and the UN Millennium Development Goals are testimony to our common commitment that people have a right to have their human needs met and to be protected against human rights abuses wherever they are. All over the world dedicated people fight to uphold these rights, be this in Iran, the US, Croatia, Zimbabwe, Australia or in Columbia or indeed anywhere in the world.

The current conflict involving Iran, is not really a conflict about Iran, Islam, nuclear programmes, or even oil. It is fundamentally a conflict about inclusivity and social justice. It highlights the urgent need to make all the voices heard that should, by right, be active participants in our debates about our shared future and common humanity.

We must finally have the courage of our convic-

tions and follow our conscious and largely sincere renunciation of colonialism and empire building by at last leaving behind the extraordinary presumption that knowledge and expertise should flow from North to South and from West to East. Two-way sharing of experience and expertise both North-South and South-North as well as South-South is becoming more and more common as people recognize that people at grass roots level have the will and the way of finding sustainable solutions to problems of poverty, ill health and environmental and humanitarian disasters. Poverty eradication programmes in Glasgow, have drawn on expertise from Bangalore, and Kenyan and Palestinian peace workers are running peace building and conflict transformation workshops in the UK.

Those who advocate that a new American led empire is needed to spread freedom and democracy may have more in common with those who advocate that we should fight for a new Islamic Caliphate than might at first appear. Both approaches are founded upon the belief that we cannot tackle corruption, low levels of educational attainment, rural poverty, social injustice, organized crime and other social ills without putting in place designed top down systems of effective governance. Both believe that designed solutions will assist the civilisational process, and both believe that they are serving the Almighty in this quest. Both President Bush and President Ahmadinejad derive inspiration from their respective country's imperial past. However, neither the Islamic caliphate of the middle ages nor the French, British or American empires which brought democracy to the East and the South, did so without huge costs, which, in the current climate, are unacceptable to many forward thinking people.

In the alleged "clash of civilizations" the commonalities may well outweigh the differences at a fundamental level. However it is vital that we take this opportunity to explore the real differences which are informed by different priorities in how values are ranked and therefore what actions may be sanctioned at the expense of others. This is as necessary in the North and the West as it is in the South and the East.

History may be on the side of the emancipators, who strive to assist the emergence of local bottom up solutions through meshworks and informal mutual help networks. However there are communities of interest that work towards increasing the influence of their values and interests through real or virtual empire building, be this political or economic. Both emancipators and empire builders may see themselves as liberators. It is time to engage those who believe that human beings are not yet everywhere mature enough to make informed and wise decisions 'for their own good' and that of society in rigorous and vigorous, yet compassionate dialogue with those who advocate the empowerment of the people to make



their own decisions.

Neither side will have all the arguments. Rather, top down designed solutions must co-evolve with bottom up emergent solutions in a living systems approach which can accommodate complexity and uncertainty within stable governance structures and processes, locally, nationally and globally. Both institutions and people need time, infrastructure, an implementation roadmap, support and challenge in order to embrace change. In addition, human beings, need love and compassion, beliefs, a role and always hope. Change management must be anchored in a robust dialogic process for continually negotiating shared meaning and collaborative solutions .

In order for such dialogue to succeed, we must recognize that there are significant cultural differences in the language political leaders use to engage each other and their people. There is much misunderstanding in the West of a style of rhetoric, which traditionally uses metaphor, hyperbole, and simile as well as a poetic device which involves stringing pearls of wisdom on a thread to create a poetic chain of associations, going back to the style of the 13th century Sufi poets such as Farid ud- Din Attar. It would seem from many of his speeches and his open letter to President Bush, that President Ahmadinejad is strongly rooted in this rhetorical tradition.

Perhaps we need to grant that President Bush may likewise be drawing on the strong rhetorical tradition of traveling hell fire preachers in his country which goes back centuries also. There certainly is some interesting academic discourse analytic research which traces similarities in the rhetorical style of President Bush and the former president of Iraq, Sadaam Hussein.

Administrative structures increasingly rely on relationship building and effective communication in order to resource the meeting of human needs through an increasingly globalised entrepreneurial economy which depends on the involvement of civil society actors in providing essential services. Leaders who prefer to have followers will feel threatened by such emergent and emancipatory civil society networks for mutual help and self governance as long as they do not fully realize that they can no longer govern a people without their full and informed consent. Everywhere leaders struggle to a greater and lesser extent to find that balance between emergent and designed systems that help to stabilize their country in the face of the challenges of modern society. True leaders educate future leaders. This is as true in the North as it is the South, and it holds in the West as it holds in the East. However, especially in the South and the East, people need to find the confidence to build much more on their own indigenous as well as personal capacity for research and

strategic thinking and effective social action..

I am certain that at the end of the day both President Bush and President Ahmadinejad know this. We need to work together to strengthen this knowledge, by analyzing in a respectful way how each leader tries to find and hold this balance and how this compares with other international leaders. We should try not to collude in adversarial and denigrating attempts by anyone to assassinate the character of either President Bush or President Ahmedinejad.

Conclusion

In conclusion , we urgently need world wide participation in international dialogue and development and we need to move forward with the UN reforms to ensure that the South and the East are properly represented at all levels including the various UN NGO fora, and most particularly the new Commission for Peacebuilding.

In this twenty first century we must generate the political will, the compassion and the wisdom to leave behind a century which has cost more lives through war and preventable disease than all previous centuries before it. We have the technology to make swords into plowshares, and we have the knowledge to plow and to sow, to nurture and to reap so that we can feed the poor:

We have methodologies for transforming conflict and violence through dialogue and development which have been tried and tested in hundreds and thousands of theatres of conflict.

We do not need another war, not even a war of words. We no longer need to talk about the need to talk- the time has come relate to one another without the scales of prejudice, open to a true meeting of hearts and minds. The 13th century Iranian poet Farid ud-Din Attar concludes his famous poem 'The conference of the birds', with this line:

*“And I too cease - I have described the Way
Now you must act - there is no more to say”*

