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## A reinvigorated NAM for a multipolar world



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## Editor's Note

NON-Aligned Movement (NAM) summits are a triennial affair but each time these meets take place, a familiar, sceptical question is raised by the Western media. What is the continuing relevance of a political formation which was set up to steer the newly emerging nations from Cold War rivalry between the West and the Soviet bloc?

The question betrays a serious misconception about the emergence of NAM. NAM was and is an expression of a desire by developing countries to chart an independent course of development in international affairs free from the tutelage or influence of any power or bloc. The Soviet bloc may well have passed into history, but for NAM a world dominated by the West is no more acceptable than one dominated by two blocs. The need for an independent voice for developing countries with shared common experience, concerns and interests provides a *raison d'être* for its continued existence.

However, because of its birth during the height of the Cold War, this expression of independence and sovereignty was viewed as nothing more than a tactical expedient to avoid taking sides in the struggle between the two power blocs – a mistaken view which caused an exasperated then-US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to declare that non-alignment was 'immoral'.

While the hostility of diehard anti-communists like Dulles was mainly ideological, the basis of the antipathy of most Western nations (and their media, reflected in their blinkered, poor coverage of NAM summits) has been more the product of centuries of Western dominance. They have never quite felt comfortable with the whole idea of the 'darker nations' coming together to form their own political grouping.

The latest NAM summit, convened in late August, nevertheless attracted some media attention, at least during its inception. The host nation of the 16th summit was Iran, and Israel, which has openly threatened to attack Iran, mounted a public campaign with the aid of its powerful lobby in the US to dissuade United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon from attending the summit on the grounds that Tehran 'represents the greatest danger to world peace'. The US chipped in, claiming that Tehran was a 'strange' and 'inappropriate' place for the summit, pointedly ignoring the fact that the choice of this venue had been made unanimously by the 120 members of NAM.

While declining Israel's unsolicited boycott advice, Ban however took pains to ensure that his speech to the summit met with a US 'expectation' – expressed by a US State Department official – to highlight 'the number of aspects of their UN obligations that Iran is flouting' – a reference to problems relating to Iran's nuclear energy programme. This unprecedented public upbraiding of a host nation by a UN Secretary-General was reported with glee by the Western media.

What was deemed not worth highlighting by major Western media outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* was the response by the host nation

to the concerns raised by the UN Secretary-General. Addressing the summit, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared that Iran was not seeking to produce nuclear weapons as it regards the use of these and chemical and other similar weapons as a 'great and unforgivable sin'. He went on to assert that Iran had 'proposed the idea of a "Middle East free of nuclear weapons" and we are committed to it'.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi in his speech reminded his audience and the world that NAM had previously committed itself to the goal of removing the world's nuclear arsenals by the year 2025. With just 13 more years to go, this goal 'will only be realised if we follow it up decisively', he told delegates.

In its final communique, NAM supported Iran's stance on its right to peaceful energy, condemned the sanctions imposed on it by the West and called for nuclear disarmament. This was clearly a triumph for Iranian diplomacy, and, as the new chair of NAM until the next summit in Venezuela, it is now better poised to fight off the West's attempts to isolate it.

Iran's problems with the West are however only a reflection of a larger problem – an outmoded global power structure inherited from the Second World War which is out of sync with an increasingly multipolar world. The call to reform outdated institutions such as the UN Security Council, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank was made by a number of countries, notably India, and embodied in the final communique.

While the issues of global governance and world peace (the linkage between them aptly captured by the summit theme 'Lasting Peace through Joint Global Governance') were dominant, issues of economic development were not ignored. The goals of South-South and regional cooperation were advanced by some significant meetings on the sidelines of the summit. Thus Iran and Pakistan reviewed mutual relations, and, more interestingly, India, Afghanistan and Iran held fruitful discussions to improve trade and investments through the creation of a new 'Southern Silk Route'. In short, the Tehran summit proved that NAM is more relevant than ever in an increasingly multipolar world.

In our cover story, we provide reports and analyses of the Tehran summit. While many of the analyses are focused on the continuing relevance of the movement, the reports give some idea of the concerns of nations which represent the overwhelming majority of humanity. Many of the issues raised, such as the need for a reform of global governance and nuclear disarmament, are often dismissed by the Western media as 'old hat'. But the fact that these demands have to be reiterated over the decades with no response from the West is surely an indictment of the refusal of the West to accept a democratised global order.

— The Editors

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**The 16th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (pic), held in Tehran, Iran, in August, was a reaffirmation of the continued relevance of NAM and its capacity to adapt to a changing world. 13**

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# The Avon Lady comes collecting Asian medicinal plants

Avon Products, the US-based cosmetics firm, is freely availing itself, in its skin care business, of plants found in countries across Asia which frequently have traditional use in multiple cultures. With patents or patents pending on 16 different plants, there is an urgent need for the affected countries and communities to assert their rights to their biodiversity and traditional knowledge. *Edward Hammond* sets out what is to be done.

AVON Products, the US-based cosmetics firm internationally known for its 'Avon Ladies', has taken a strong interest in Asian medicinal plants, patenting and incorporating them into its skin care products. The company has filed six patent applications on use of Asian plants in skin creams in the past several years. These claims collectively cover 16 different Asian plant species. To date, three US patents have been issued, and Avon is seeking rights in other countries, including inside Asia itself.

Five of the 16 plants claimed in the patent applications are already in use by Avon, and one or more of them can be found in more than two dozen Avon skin and eye care products currently sold worldwide. Four of the company's major skin care product lines contain these patented, or patent-pending, plant ingredients.

All of the plants that Avon claims have traditional medicinal use in Asian countries, and some of them have been used to treat skin disorders. Most of the plants are found in more than one Asian country, and are traditionally used in multiple cultures. It would thus likely prove difficult for any single country to exclusively assert sovereignty over the claimed resources.

This signals the importance of regional cooperation under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing. Because many of the plants Avon claims, and relevant traditional uses of them, occur in multiple countries, collective action is more likely to bring a positive result in cases such



Avon has filed six patent applications on use of Asian plants in skin creams. Among the 16 different plant species covered in these applications is agati (*pic*), which is used in Asian traditional medicine, including for skin problems.

as this. Avon's claims also indicate the need for a robust clearinghouse mechanism under the Nagoya Protocol so as to promote awareness of regional access and benefit-sharing issues.

## The lucrative skin care market

The skin cream market is bigger business than many might suspect. It is the largest segment of the global 'personal care products' industry which, according to analysts, will reach \$333 billion in annual sales by 2015. Skin care is estimated to account for more than one-quarter of that amount, or roughly \$90 billion per year.

To put that large number in perspective, each year across the globe people spend about as much money on skin cream as they do on Sony electronics (\$87 billion), and more than is spent on pet food (\$80 billion). Skin cream sales sum three to four times as much as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s estimate for the annual cost to provide universal safe drinking water and sanitation services (\$20-\$30 billion).

Analysts say that the worldwide market growth is driven by the larger number of women over 50 years of age, increases in women's disposable income and greater male interest in skin care products. The skin cream market is particularly strong for products that make 'anti-ageing', 'firming'

cc Viky.nandha



and ‘anti-cellulite’ claims.

Not coincidentally, these claims are precisely the subject of Avon’s patent applications on Asian plants. In 2009, the Asia-Pacific market for such products was 41% of the world total, or about \$33 billion, and continued expansion in Asia is considered a priority for the industry, which is dominated by US and European companies.

### Avon Products, Inc.

With \$11 billion in annual sales and a market capitalisation of over \$9 billion, US-based Avon is a significant player in the cosmetics and personal care industries. Founded in 1886, the company was a pioneer of multi-level marketing and, in many parts of the world, the ‘Avon Lady’ is a familiar phenomenon.

The company pursues a similar business strategy everywhere, focusing on what industry calls ‘direct sales’, by putting women into the business of selling Avon products to friends and acquaintances. These saleswomen, in turn, convert some of their customers into dealers themselves, building and perpetuating a sales chain in which transactions largely occur in living rooms and on street corners, rather than in Avon-branded storefronts.

More recently, the company has also started online and kiosk sales, especially in countries that have restrictions on multi-level marketing, including China. The company has also simplified global product lines, with its current offerings varying little from country to country.

Avon is profitable, paying an annual dividend of nearly \$1 per share of its stock. Through a charitable foundation the company claims (in confusing and perhaps misleading language) to be the ‘largest corporate supporter focused solely on women’s issues across the globe’.

The company’s marketing tends toward images of a ‘high-tech’ product development process led by scientists in laboratory coats at a research headquarters in the US state of New York. Although natural products are

not the main thrust of Avon’s marketing, review of the Avon product ingredients reveals very frequent use of plant extracts (discussed in more detail below).

Avon appears eager to expand its skin care offerings. In 2010, it bought UK-based Liz Earle, a skin cream company with a different marketing approach, selling in storefronts and on television shopping channels. Botanical ingredients are a matter of emphasis for Liz Earle, whose corporate tagline is ‘naturally active skincare’.

Advertised or not, however, plants are an important part of Avon’s skin products.

### Avon’s patent claims on Asian plants

Avon’s intellectual property claims reveal the company to be particularly interested in Asian medicinal and food plants. The company has recently obtained three patents on such plants, and three more patent applications are pending. Collectively, the plants are associated with countries across the region, including Southeast Asia, China and South Asia. In total, claims are made on the use of 16 different Asian plants in skin care products.

Avon appears to be pursuing its claims not only in the US, Canada, Japan and Europe, but in developing countries as well. Only limited information on the international status of patent applications is available online. However, the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)’s Patentscope database indicates that at least three patent applications have been lodged in China and two in Mexico. More may exist without being reflected in the WIPO data.

### The plants that Avon claims

How Avon accessed the plants that it claims is not known. Some, such as *Eclipta prostrata*, are relatively ubiquitous and could be obtained virtually anywhere. Others, such as *Stephania rotunda*, are far more likely to be sourced from Asia itself, certainly if needed in any con-

siderable quantity. In the past, Avon has maintained company researchers in Asia and relationships with Asian academic institutions. In all of the patents described here, however, Avon company employees based in New York are indicated as the inventors, strongly suggesting that the research and product development occurred there.

The company’s claims are of varying specificity. All of the claims relate to use of the Asian plants in skin care products. Some patent applications appear relatively specific, for example, claiming the use of plants to stimulate production of a particular protein by the skin (e.g., application WO2012005876), while others, such as the claims on *Tiliacora triandra* (WO2012002950), are broader and in effect claim use of that plant as an ingredient in any product that improves ‘the aesthetic appearance of aging skin’.

Most of the 16 plants Avon claims are familiar food and medicinal plants in different Asian countries, including the following examples:

**Bignay:** In patent application WO2012005876, Avon claims use of four different Asian plants used in skin care products that stimulate production of a skin protein called MAGP-1. Among them is the bignay (*Antidesma bunius*), a fruit tree grown across Asia. Also called ‘mao luang’ or ‘currant tree’, the bignay’s striking strands of multicoloured fruit are a popular food in Indonesia, while in the Philippines and Thailand, the fruit is both eaten and made into a wine. Bignay is very frequently cited among inventories of medicinal plants of diverse cultures across the region.

**Elephant foot yam:** In US patent 7,618,662, Avon claims use of six different Asian plants in products that stimulate fat production by the skin (which is said to improve appearance). Among the plants claimed is *Amorphophallus campanulatus*, an aroid known in English as the elephant foot yam. Grown for its edible tuber, the elephant foot yam plant has a pungent odour and many documented traditional medicinal uses, including to treat skin disorders.

**Agati:** Also claimed in US patent 7,618,662 is *Sesbania grandiflora*, or agati (sometimes 'agathi'). Frequently grown in Southeast Asia and India, the plant's leaves are used for food and, in Thailand, its flowers used in soups. It is also used in both Ayurvedic medicine and traditional medicine in Southeast Asia, including for skin problems.

**Bai yanang:** Avon claims use of *Tiliacora triandra* in skin care products in patent application WO2012002950. With no English common name, the plant is usually called bai yanang, or simply yanang, its name in Laos and Thailand. Bai yanang is closely associated with the foods of Laos and the Isan culture of Thailand, where the leaves of this commonly cultivated plant are used in soups. In Vietnam, the plant is used to create a popular jelly.

**False daisy:** In patent application WO2011156136, Avon claims *Eclipta prostrata*, known as false daisy, as a cellulite treatment. False daisy is a native of the Americas that is widely distributed around the world. It can be considered Asian, however, because its medicinal use has mainly been developed there. In China, its use for many health problems was advised in the manual for that country's famous 'barefoot doctors', while it also appears in accounts of Indian traditional medicine, including use to treat skin problems.

**Alisma orientale:** Avon has obtained exclusive rights to another Chinese plant in US patent 7,410,658, which claims use of *Alisma orientale* to treat skin problems. Known as dong fang ze xie, the plant grows on the margin of lakes and ponds in a large part of China and in some surrounding countries.

**Bình vôi:** In US patent 7,514,092, the company claims skin treatments using any of three Asian plants, including *Stephania rotunda*, an unusual plant cultivated in Vietnam. There it is called bình vôi, meaning 'lime pot'. The name refers to the shape of the



The 'Avon Lady' is a familiar element of Avon's marketing strategy. With \$11 billion in annual sales, US-based Avon is a significant player in the cosmetics and personal care industries.

plant's unusual tuber, which is mostly above the soil, and which resembles the shape of ceramic pots used to hold lime (for betel nut chewing). English sources sometimes give the plant's name as 'saboo leard'.

**Soap nut:** Also claimed in US patent 7,514,092 is *Sapindus rarak*. This species is one of several that are sometimes called 'soap nut' in English. *S. rarak* is particularly well known in Indonesia, where it is called lerak. As its English name implies, the plant's seeds produce soapy compounds and, in Indonesia, lerak is favoured for use in washing traditional batik fabrics. Like many other plants claimed by Avon, lerak is well known in Asia for traditional medicinal uses, including on the skin.

### The Fountain of Youth: Asian medicinal plants in Avon products

The ingredients of Avon products were reviewed to determine how the plants that the company claims are being used. To date, five of the plants claimed in the patents and patent applications can be found in Avon's skin care products: false daisy (*Eclipta prostrata*), elephant foot yam (*Amorphophallus campanulatus*), agati (*Sesbania grandiflora*),

*Pouzolzia pentandra* (a herb found from India to Southeast Asia; frequently mentioned in relation to Thai traditional medicine, its traditional uses include treatment of skin rashes) and soap nut (*Sapindus rarak*). Because each plant is used in several items within an Avon skin care product line, the five plants can collectively be found in more than 24 Avon products.

Like a modern commercial version of the Fountain of Youth legend, all of the four product lines that contain the Asian plant extracts consist of items that claim to make the skin of users appear younger. Each product line is marketed to women of a particular age range, for whom the product is allegedly specifically formulated. For example, 'Anew Platinum' products are marketed to women over 60 years of age.

The company's financial statements report all 'beauty' sales together; thus, specific figures for sales of products containing the patented and patent-pending ingredients are unavailable. As they constitute a large proportion of Avon's entire skin care offerings, however, they are likely to be a significant part of the company's approximately \$8 billion annual beauty category sales.

Avon's formidable marketing promotes the products as restorative of youth, with claims that can approach the absurd, such as the assertion that after using one product '75% of people felt like they had new skin overnight'.

A stable of Hollywood stars makes global product endorsements – Jacqueline Bisset for the older set, Reese Witherspoon for the 30- and 40-somethings, etc. These actresses are supplemented by regionally known fashion models and celebrities who push sales at events hosted by Avon's national sales offices. "I am excited to be working with Avon on the Anew Platinum Collection, as it specifically addresses the needs of women with my skincare concerns,"

reveals Jacqueline,' gushes one Avon press release, quoting the 67-year-old star of the late 1960s and 1970s.

## Biodiversity Convention and Nagoya Protocol implications

Where and when did Avon acquire the plants it claims, and what, if any, benefit-sharing arrangements are in place? The answers to these questions may clarify the implications of Avon's patent claims for countries that are CBD Parties, particularly those that have joined the Nagoya Protocol or that already have national access and benefit-sharing (ABS) laws. Unfortunately, however, there is little concrete information available.

No documentation could be located regarding any benefit-sharing agreements in relation to Avon's patent claims, and it appears unlikely that any exist. All of the inventors in Avon's patent claims are indicated to be at Avon's research facility in New York. Avon's philanthropic arm, the Avon Foundation, is exclusively focused on funding breast cancer research and programmes aimed at preventing violence against women. While worthy causes, these do not appear to have any benefit-sharing relationship with the company's use of biodiversity, particularly considering that the Foundation's publications do not reflect any interest in environment, biodiversity or traditional knowledge issues.

What is clear, however, is that all of the plants that Avon has claimed are native to more than one Asian country or have been long used in more than one Asian country. It is also unmistakable that in at least some cases, Avon's use of the plants in skin care products was preceded by use of the same plants to treat skin ailments in traditional medicine. This situation is indicative of the need for a robust clearinghouse under the Nagoya Protocol and for regional cooperation when plants and knowledge about them spill over borders. For example, in the case of bai yanang, it appears that cultivation and traditional use is common in Laos, Vietnam and Thailand, and that any response to Avon's

patent application would be stronger if it included participation of more than one country.

A robust clearinghouse mechanism under the Nagoya Protocol would increase the possibility of early detection and response to cases involving genetic resources found in more than one country. For example, Avon's use of *Eclipta prostrata* may implicate traditional knowledge, even if the plant itself could be obtained from a variety of locations. Similarly, *Pouzolzia pentandra* is a herb that could be sourced from several countries, although traditional knowledge pertinent to Avon's use of the plant may not be held in all of those places.

## Conclusion

Avon Products, Inc. is freely availing itself of Asian medicinal plants, with patents or patents pending on 16 different species at the time of writing. Five species under patent claim are already incorporated into commercialised Avon products that anchor its skin care business worldwide. The plants are found in countries across Asia and frequently have traditional use in multiple cultures. Avon's patent claims are of varying breadth and, in some cases, appear to mimic traditional uses. Because the plants and their uses are diffused through the region, cooperation among countries appears key to addressing the situation.

What can be done? Firstly, documentation of the relevant traditional medicinal uses (e.g., on the skin, in eye care) of these plants should be assembled. Most of this knowledge may be held by indigenous peoples and traditional communities and/or otherwise recorded in countries of origin. This information may be important in any discussions with the company.



Avon skin care products. Five Asian medicinal plants claimed by Avon in patents and patent applications are already being used in some of the company's skin care product lines.

Secondly, governments may ask Avon to produce documentation of where, when, and with what informed consent and benefit-sharing arrangement it has collected plants and possibly knowledge.

Because the plants and knowledge are geographically dispersed, and because several patent applications claim multiple plants, this request to Avon would be most appropriately advanced by countries working in cooperation with each other. It appears likely that informed consent and benefit-sharing arrangements are inadequate, and may be non-existent.

With those facts established, the degree of Avon's respect for the CBD and pursuant national ABS legislation can be gauged. Although Avon is a US-based company (the US has not ratified the CBD), it is engaged in the skin care business through subsidiaries it controls in Asia, where all countries are CBD Parties. This business is important for Avon. Current sales and future sales growth in Asia are critical to the company's long-term success, and this factor may be used to encourage the company to redress the present situation and to undertake to respect CBD obligations, ABS law and traditional knowledge in its future business use of plant ingredients. ♦

*Edward Hammond directs Prickly Research (www.pricklyresearch.com), a research and writing consultancy based in Austin, Texas, USA. He has worked on biodiversity and infectious disease issues since 1994. The above is extracted from a fully referenced Briefing Paper (No. 64, May 2012) published by the Third World Network and which is available on the TWN website www.twn.my.*



# Africa's land grabs: A disaster in waiting

The scramble for Africa's farmlands could have catastrophic consequences.

Alex Awiti

A NEW report by Oxfam, a leading international relief agency, warns that climate change will increase the frequency of large spikes in global food prices, leading to more hungry people around the world. Besides climate change, rapid population growth, higher per capita incomes, rapid urbanisation, changing diets in developing countries and rising demand for biofuel feedstocks are exerting unprecedented pressure on the global food system.

The world's poorest, a majority of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa, are especially vulnerable to rising food prices because they spend up to 75% of their income on food. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the price surges of 2007-08 resulted in an 8% increase in the number of malnourished people in Africa.

According to the OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2012, food production needs to increase by 60% over the next 40 years to meet the rising global demand for food. To meet the soaring global demand, additional food will need to come from a combination of increased productivity and expansion of farmland.

Globally, the scope for expanding farmland is limited. But with 60% of the world's unused arable land, Africa's land is a hot commodity. Foreign investors are scrambling for Africa's farmland. The pace of purchase or lease of Africa's land is so furious that it is now referred to as a 'land grab'.

Of the 83.2 million hectares of land earmarked for agricultural investment worldwide, 56.2 million hectares are in Africa. The land grab was in part fuelled by the food and financial crisis of 2008, as corporations and investment funds began to focus on the profitability of agricultural commodities.

For Wall Street-based private equity firms, the motive is profits. For

countries scrambling for Africa's farmland – Saudi Arabia, India and China – the real value is water. Saudi Arabia does not lack land for food production. What's missing in the kingdom is water. Indian companies are doing the same because aquifers across the sub-continent have been depleted by decades of unsustainable irrigation. Africa's land grabs could be the biggest virtual water export in history.

The huge land deals in Africa involve large-scale, commercial agriculture, which will require large quantities of water and mineral fertilisers. Nearly all of the foreign land deals are located in Africa's major river basins: the Congo, the Niger and the Nile. Collectively, three of the main countries in the Nile basin – Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan – have already leased about 8.5 million hectares. Uganda has leased a total of 868,000 hectares to investors from China, Egypt, Singapore and India.

The Kenyan government has granted the Tana River Authority (TARDA) tenure rights to 40,000 hectares of the Tana Delta. TARDA, in a joint venture with Mumias Sugar Company, seeks to establish sugarcane plantations on the fragile delta. A second company, Mat International, is in the process of acquiring 30,000 hectares of land in the Tana Delta. Bedford Biofuels, a Canadian company, could secure a 45-year lease on 65,000 hectares in Tana River District, which includes access to water resources, to produce biofuels.

Also in Kenya, in Lake Victoria, Dominion Farms was granted a lease on 7,000 hectares in the hydrologically vital and ecologically fragile Yala Swamp. These land grabs could hurt smallholder farmers and could undermine national food security objectives. In the Yala Swamp,

local communities have lost access to water and pasture for their livestock. According to residents of the Tana Delta, allocation of land to TARDA displaced them to a sub-optimal area with poor access to water and suitable land for agriculture.

The wave of land-grabbing is nothing short of an ecological and economic disaster in the making. There is simply not enough water in Africa's rivers and water tables to irrigate all the newly acquired land.

The ecological and social costs of foreign-led commercial agriculture are socialised while the benefits are privatised by big industry. Africa must learn from Asia. Pakistan flooded its way into the Green Revolution. The mighty Indus River irrigates 90% of the country's crops. Today the Indus hardly flows all the way into the Arabian Sea. Hundreds of thousands of hectares of farmland are no longer usable due to waterlogging or salinisation. Similarly, India drilled and pumped its way into the Green Revolution. Today India's annual abstraction of ground water for irrigation is 250 cubic kilometres per year, about 100 cubic kilometres more than can be recharged by rainfall.

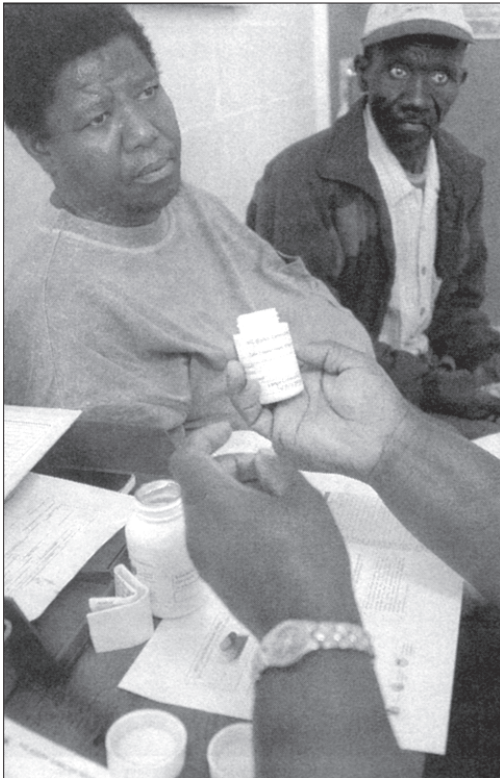
Transformation of Africa's agriculture must be predicated on sustainable use of natural capital, especially water. Improving the productivity and efficiency of hundreds of millions of Africa's hardworking smallholder farmers must be central to this transformation. Investments in industrial-scale agriculture must be balanced by an equitable flow of benefits to smallholder farmers, reducing their alienation and encouraging their participation through access to technology, credit, inputs and markets. ♦

*Alex Awiti is an ecosystems ecologist based at Aga Khan University in Nairobi. This article is reproduced from The Star (Kenya) (12 September 2012).*



# Overcoming patents on unaffordable drugs

There are some positive moves by some developing countries to address the problem of the high cost of vital patented drugs.



**A South African couple receiving ARV medications for HIV/AIDS. Due to widespread patenting, the newest ARVs are being priced out of reach of patients in poor and middle-income countries.**

MIDDLE-income countries are increasingly taking measures to overcome the patents that price drugs out of reach, according to a report released on 25 July by the international medical humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), 'Untangling the Web of Antiretroviral Price Reductions'.

In March, India for the first time issued a 'compulsory licence' to override a drug patent on the cancer drug sorafenib tosylate, produced by Bayer. The move sets an important precedent for access to unaffordable antiretroviral (ARV) drugs for treating HIV/AIDS. China has also just confirmed its mechanism to override

patents.

'Our report shows that the newest HIV drugs are now patented in India, the pharmacy of the developing world, and this blocks the production of more affordable generic versions that we need for some of our patients,' said Nathan Ford, Medical Director of MSF's Access Campaign. 'The power balance has to change as developing countries begin to make use of their rights to overcome patents when monopoly sellers price their drugs out of reach. For this reason, we fully support countries like India that are using their new patent laws to deal with monopoly abuses. If high prices prevent access to life-saving medicines, they override them.'

The newest ARVs are unaffordable: a triple combination

of the three drugs raltegravir, efavirenz and darunavir boosted with zidovudine and zalcitabine for people who have failed a second-line regimen, costs \$2,486 per person per year in least-developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa – nearly 15 times the price of a first-line regimen. Meanwhile, middle-income countries pay many times more: MSF's HIV and tuberculosis treatment programme in India pays more than \$2,147 per patient per year for

just the drug raltegravir; in El Salvador the drug efavirenz alone costs \$6,917, while darunavir costs \$8,468 per year in Georgia.

## Locked out

Additionally, over the last two years, lower-middle- and middle-income countries have been locked out of company discount programmes and are forced to negotiate prices on a case-by-case basis, which has led to higher prices. 'Untangling the Web' shows that the patient-friendly one-pill-a-day combination of TDF/FTC/EFV (produced by Merck/BMS/Gilead) for the last five years has remained at \$1,033 in lower-middle-income countries, six times more than the generic first-line combination, and countries locked out of these dis-



**A production facility for generic AIDS drugs. Generic medicines are an affordable alternative to patented versions.**

counts must pay many times more.

Lower-middle-income and middle-income countries are also increasingly being blocked from accessing medicines produced under voluntary licence agreements between multinational pharmaceutical companies and generic manufacturers, where the terms and conditions are largely kept secret. The report finds that there is no voluntary licence agreement for ARVs that covers all developing countries.

‘Multinational companies are trying to give the impression that with voluntary licence agreements, all HIV drug access problems are solved, but our report shows that some countries are deliberately being left out, and there are other terms that restrict competition,’ said Michelle Childs, Director of Policy/Advocacy at MSF’s Access Campaign.

### Patent laws

Several of the newest ARVs are already priced out of reach because they have been patented in India, blocking the production of more affordable generic versions.

Until 2005, India did not grant patents on medicines, which allowed free competition among generic producers. This helped drive prices down by 99% for the first generation of ARVs, from more than \$10,000 per person per year in 2000 to roughly \$120 today.

While the country had to begin granting patents under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules in 2005, India designed a patent law that is strict about what merits a patent. The law also allows any interested party to oppose a patent before or after it is granted. Such patent oppositions have already led to multiple ARV patents being rejected in India, such as for the drugs tenofovir and lopinavir/ritonavir.

In contrast, South Africa’s law is particularly lax about patenting, with 2,442 pharmaceutical patents having been granted in 2008 alone compared to just 278 in Brazil for the five-year period of 2003 to 2008.

‘As more people need access to



India’s patent law allows any interested party to oppose a patent before or after it is granted. Picture shows a public protest against pharmaceutical patents held in front of the Mumbai office of multinational drug giant Novartis.

newer drugs that are priced out of reach, countries should take a close and hard look at their patent laws to make sure that monopolies aren’t being handed out left and right, with dire consequences,’ said Childs. ‘The fact

that countries are putting flexible mechanisms into place and are using these is a game-changer.’

MSF provides HIV treatment to 220,000 people in 23 countries. — MSF Access Campaign ◆

## ARV pills, patents and prices

THE following are some highlights from the ‘Untangling the Web’ report:

- The price of tenofovir-based regimens is now nearly the same (when combined with nevirapine), or lower (when combined with efavirenz), than AZT-based regimens, for countries that can access generic versions because patents do not form a barrier, or where voluntary licences allow access to generic versions.

- The fixed-dose combination of TDF/FTC/EFV (produced by Merck/BMS/Gilead) – which is an adherence-friendly once-a-day pill – has remained priced at \$613 and \$1,033 per patient per year (ppy) for lower-income and lower-middle-income countries, respectively, for the last five years. For middle-income countries, prices can be even higher, as most companies have eliminated their standardised discount pro-

grammes for these countries, in favour of case-by-case price negotiations.

- The price of the TDF/3TC/EFV co-pack of two pills to be taken once a day has come down by 20% since last year, to \$113 ppy, making it the most affordable option of the World Health Organisation (WHO)-recommended first-line regimens, with the added benefit of once-daily dosing.

- Today’s most affordable second-line regimen (AZT/3TC + ATV/r) is priced at \$399 ppy, down from \$442 for last year’s most affordable combination. This however is still three times more than the most affordable first-line regimen. For countries where generic versions cannot be used because of patent barriers or because they are excluded from the geographical scope of the voluntary licences, the price can be many times higher.



# Free-market myths

As Myanmar opens up to the world, the issue of foreign investment has come to the fore. In the following piece published in one of the country's leading newspapers, *Rick Rowden* warns the people and policymakers against hasty amendments to their foreign investment laws based on popular misconceptions and myths about the nature of such investments.

THE foreign investment law amendments have dominated debate in Myanmar in recent months. But Myanmar should take all the time it needs to introduce amendments that can best serve its long-term economic development needs and should not allow itself to be rushed into sub-optimal arrangements because of its desire to distance itself from China or commercial pressure from Western investors.

When it comes to assessing its long-term developmental needs, Myanmar should not be swayed by foreign advisers advocating the laissez-faire approach to foreign direct investment (FDI) policy, but instead should beware of some of the most popular mythologies in the dominant free-market school of thought in economics.

## Types of foreign investment

The first myth is that any FDI is good FDI. However, there are at least three main types of FDI: greenfield, brownfield and short-term speculative investment. Greenfield is the best type because it usually involves creating new businesses, building new factories and creating new jobs, and tends to be longer-term in nature.

Brownfield investment, also known as mergers and acquisitions, in which foreign investors come and buy up existing firms, can be helpful in restructuring some firms to become more efficient and expose workers to improved management skills, but such investments can also destroy jobs, reduce the number of domestic companies, and extract quickly generated wealth from the country. Foreign investments should not act as mere substitution for domestic companies but should result in additional

net capital formation.

Portfolio, short-term or speculative investment can be helpful in providing short-term capital, but such speculative investments can also be very dangerous, leading to risky asset price bubbles (such as in real estate) and destabilising rapid capital inflows and outflows.

Myanmar's amendments to its foreign investment law should recognise these differences and structure its FDI incentives and tax breaks accordingly, prioritising incentives for greenfield investments and using disincentives and effective regulation on FDI in brownfield and portfolio investments.

A second popular myth in the orthodox school of laissez-faire economics is that 'a level playing field' and 'national treatment' are very good and policies or rules that favour domestic firms over foreign investors are 'discriminatory' and 'unfair' and very bad.

The widespread popularity of these misconceptions is unfortunate because Myanmar absolutely must retain policies that treat foreign investors unfairly, that tilt the playing field in favour of its domestic firms and that proactively discriminate against foreign investors. It must do so for all of the same reasons that each of the industrialised countries adopted the same policies when they were first industrialising.

Beginning with the UK in the 1500s all the way through to Korea in the 1960s, the rich countries figured out a very important lesson early on: foreign investment policies should be used primarily to support and build up the manufacturing value-added capacity of their own domestic firms; if foreign investment did not do this, it did not get in.

This important lesson has been wholly unlearned in recent decades. Today, adopting 'national treatment' for multinational corporations which enter Myanmar to compete with its domestic firms is exactly like having Manchester United play a football game against an opposing team made up of schoolgirls. It might be a 'level' playing field but we can easily guess what the outcome will be – and we've seen it all over sub-Saharan Africa for three decades. Today's advocates of free-market capitalism and many Western investors are hoping that Myanmar will be unaware of this fundamental lesson.

A third popular myth is that FDI is only attracted to countries that have low wages, weak labour laws and non-existent environmental regulation. Such mythology is reinforced by the World Bank's annual 'Doing Business' indicators. In fact, the data shows that most FDI is attracted to countries with good transportation infrastructure, and a healthy, literate and well-skilled labour force. That is why it will be important for Myanmar to scale up its long-term public investment as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) in the underlying public transportation, public health and public education systems and make the big, upfront investments needed to eventually realise increased worker productivity and higher GDP growth in the future.

However, in order to make such big, upfront public investments, the country will need to categorically reject the policy advice to come from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which will likely insist that Myanmar maintain a 'prudent' restrictive fiscal policy in the constant short term – to the point where the country ends up chronically underfunding its

public investment as a percentage of GDP over decades.

Myanmar should invite educators and health workers from any of dozens of sub-Saharan African countries that have dilapidated and collapsing health and education infrastructures and ask them about their experience with IMF fiscal policy restraint.

One of the troubling aspects of the recent discussions about amendments to Myanmar's foreign investment law is the backwards timing of it all. It seems almost impossible to figure out what a good foreign investment policy is for Myanmar without first having some clarity on the long-term roadmap for future national economic development. Myanmar's current 30-year Industrial Development Plan for the period 2000-30 sets out some ambitious targets but offers very little detail on policy strategies for establishing an orderly, efficient and competitive industrial sector. The government is revising and updating the plan but such a process would ideally precede the changes in the foreign investment law.

A fourth myth of *laissez-faire* economics that Myanmar would do well to reject is the binary discourse that supposes a 'private sector' that is good and a 'public sector' that is bad. In fact, the far more important binary for Myanmar to consider is the fundamental differences between its 'domestic' companies and 'international' companies. It should make a long list of all the ways in which the capabilities, needs and interests of its domestic firms are different from those of foreign investors, and then adopt policies to adequately address these differences with support for the domestic firms. Making such clear distinctions is a first step in developing a new and more detailed 30-year development strategy, and should be an essential prerequisite for informing any amendments to the foreign investment law.

A fifth myth of free-market economics is that FDI will always produce a happy 'win-win' situation in which both foreign investors and host countries equally benefit. While it is important to incentivise the right types

of FDI to achieve such win-win situations, Myanmar must acknowledge there are also other cases when benefits are too asymmetrical in favour of the investor, and indeed, when the investor's benefits are in direct opposition to the development of domestic firms and industries.

While Myanmar must have the proper incentives for attracting beneficial FDI, it must reject the happy mythology of 'win-win' and also have in place policies to address the other scenarios as well. That will likely require an investment policy that clearly sets out rights and obligations for the country and investors that are explicitly designed to further national economic development goals – even if this means policies and regulations that treat foreign investors unfairly, tilt the playing field in favour of domestic firms and proactively discriminate against foreign investors.

### Recipe for disaster

A sixth popular myth in *laissez-faire* economics supports the idea that liberalising the financial sector will bring new international sources of needed finance capital. This myth is enthusiastically supported by large international banks eager to enter Myanmar. But allowing too many foreign banks to enter without adequate regulations and incentives and disincentives to steer capital towards supporting domestic commercial lending could be a recipe for disaster.

Myanmar may want to ask the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and domestic firms from across sub-Saharan Africa how well such advice on financial liberalisation has enabled them to access long-term, low-interest commercial credit. In many cases, the foreign banks have out-competed the small domestic banks but now will not lend to domestic firms because of the perceived high risk, and because of better returns in more speculative activities. Furthermore, African SMEs are left with nowhere to turn, because the *laissez-faire* advice of Western donors also had them abolish their public development banks.

Myanmar should reject this mythology and instead focus on the strong advantages of mobilising domestic savings, as distinct from relying on foreign borrowing. Myanmar should also learn from countries such as Brazil, which have successfully used public development banks to channel long-term, low-interest finance capital for helping to build up their domestic industries, and take steps to strengthen and expand the Myanmar Industrial Development Bank.

A seventh myth of the free-market school of thought suggests that Myanmar should just stick to producing what it is already good at or endowed with in terms of natural resources. This is referred to as specialising in its areas of 'comparative advantage'. But Myanmar must distinguish between its current 'static' comparative advantages and possibilities for its future 'dynamic' comparative advantages in 10, 20 and 30 years from now.

For example, when South Korea decided to begin supporting the slow development of a shipbuilding industry in the 1960s, the World Bank advised the country to stick to its comparative advantage in primary agricultural commodities. Instead, South Korea 'defied' its static comparative advantage at the time and used industrial policies to build the industries necessary for it to become a world-class shipbuilder by the 1990s. For Myanmar to set its sights no farther than small-scale agricultural processing and light manufacturing would be to undermine its possible long-term industrialisation trajectory, and such short-sightedness should be rejected in Myanmar for the same reasons as it was in South Korea.

This myth is related to another misconception in free-market orthodoxy that says economic activities do not matter, but rather efficiency, competitiveness and the unhindered realm of market exchange are the only things to focus on. By this logic, it is perfectly acceptable for Myanmar to specialise in agriculture and gems forever, rather than moving on to producing automobiles or airplanes, as



long as it does so more efficiently than its market competitors. This myth papers over previously long-understood important distinctions between economic activities that provide diminishing and increasing returns over time and, if adopted, would lock in Myanmar to dead-end, low-productivity activities.

Instead, Myanmar should exploit its static comparative advantages as short-term steps but it should also be just as vigorous in defying them with industrial policy strategies to build future comparative advantages in manufacturing, with clear strategies to increase the manufacturing value added in its exports over time. Rather than buying into the mythology, the rich countries figured out a long time ago the importance of manufacturing to wealth creation, and the importance of public investment in research and development, technology and innovation policies to further advance the manufacturing capacities of their domestic firms.

This gets back to why a clear national development strategy should be formulated before Myanmar engages in amendments to its foreign investment law. If Myanmar carefully assessed its domestic manufacturers and observed where they are currently on the 'ladder' of value-added production, and what skills and technology they need to get onto the next few rungs of the ladder, this could go much farther than free-market mythology in informing how best to incentivise the most helpful types of greenfield FDI in manufacturing.

At the end of the day FDI is like trade in that it is only a tool: it can either be wasted or used strategically to support national economic development. As to whether Myanmar looks more like South Korea or Nigeria 30 years from now, the answer will be determined by the people of Myanmar, not foreign investors. ♦

*Rick Rowden is a development consultant and doctoral candidate in economic studies and planning at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi who recently visited Myanmar. Previously he worked as an inter-regional adviser for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva and a senior policy analyst for the non-governmental organisation ActionAid. This article was first published in the Myanmar Times (24 September 2012).*

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# Campaigners slam 'vulture fund' attack on Argentina

The recent seizure of an Argentine naval ship in Ghana by a vulture fund has served to highlight the nefarious role of such funds.

JUBILEE Debt Campaign, a UK-based coalition campaigning for cancellation of unjust and unpayable debts, has condemned the latest move of vulture fund NML to seize an Argentine naval ship in Ghana in an attempt to get a payout on odious Argentine debt. NML is owned by US hedge fund Elliott Associates, run by Paul Singer, one of Mitt Romney's major donors. The ship has been impounded by a Ghanaian court.

Nick Dearden of Jubilee Debt Campaign said: 'This case shows how, despite political progress, vulture fund activity is still thriving. For well-known figures in the financial and political world to be involved in profiteering from economic crises is something which many people find abhorrent. Over 10 years after doing the right thing by its people, and defaulting on unpayable and often odious debts, Argentina is still not free of these hedge funds.'

'Leaving financial markets free to make profit at any price has already plunged the world into a deep economic crisis. Vulture funds are a prime example of unregulated finance. If we don't take fundamental action to deter the vultures, the situation faced by Argentina today will be faced by Greece and others tomorrow.'

Vulture funds are companies that buy up defaulted sovereign debt cheaply in order to sue the country concerned for the full value of that debt. These companies have blighted countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia and Liberia for years, threatening to drain their already-depleted treasuries in order to make a substantial profit.

The UK government passed a law in 2010 that effectively made such activity impossible against low-income countries in UK courts on the



**The Argentine naval ship ARA Libertad has been impounded at the Ghanaian port of Tema as a result of a court action brought by a vulture fund seeking a payout on odious Argentine debt.**

basis of old debts, but it does not cover middle-income countries like Argentina.

NML is a subsidiary of Elliott Associates, a US hedge fund that pioneered vulture fund activity by winning a case against Peru in the 1990s, getting back 400% what they paid for Peru's debt. It is based in the Cayman Islands.

NML's claim is based on debts which Argentina defaulted on back in 2001. Much of the debt from this time was regarded as illegitimate by Argentina's people, originating in the brutal dictatorship of the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period known as the 'dirty war' in Argentina, when 30,000 people were 'disappeared' and loans poured into the military, speculation, capital flight and interest payments. At the time of the default, Argentina had experienced three years of recession and over half the population – 20 million people – were living below the poverty line.

Most of Argentina's creditors from this time accepted a restructuring of their debt, but a number of vulture funds such as NML 'held out' against such a deal, even though the company bought the debt for only half of its face value, knowing the country was in economic crisis. – *Jubilee Debt Campaign* ♦

## The background

IN December of 2001 the government of Argentina defaulted on about \$81 billion (plus interest) of its sovereign debt, as a result of a general economic collapse that followed a deep recession. In 2005 about 75% of the defaulted bondholders reached an agreement with the government that paid about 30 cents on the dollar. The remainder, with some \$19.4 billion, held out with the hope of getting more later.

The holdouts have a lobby group in Washington, the American Task Force Argentina (ATFA). It is headed by former Clinton administration officials, who are trying to use Congress to put pressure on Argentina. The lobbyists include vulture fund investors, who buy up defaulted debt at a small fraction of face value and then use

lawsuits and other pressure tactics to fight for the face value of the bonds.

Who are the constituents that ATFA represents? A look at 15 bondholders that hold more than \$25 million each in claims against Argentina shows that nine of them have addresses in the Cayman Islands. One of these is NML Capital Ltd, a vulture fund affiliate of the hedge fund firm Elliott Associates (a member of ATFA), run by founder Paul Singer. According to Bloomberg News, NML Capital bought at least \$182 million of Argentine debt for 15-30 cents on the dollar. Singer has taken a gamble that paid off in Peru in 2000. He made a 400% profit from the Peruvian government through lawsuits and pressure.

Source: Mark Weisbrot, 'Vultures circle Argentina', [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), 5 June 2009



# A summit that revitalised the Non-Aligned Movement

Unfazed by US and Israeli calls for its boycott, heads of state and representatives of some 120 non-aligned countries convened in Tehran on 26-31 August for the Non-Aligned Movement's 16th summit. As *Martin Khor*, who attended the summit, reports, the reinvigoration of this largest international political organisation of developing countries was the result of a strong desire of these countries to have their own say in decision-making in a multipolar world.



The recent 16th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Tehran saw many leaders calling for a revival of the importance of NAM.

THE summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) concluded in Tehran on 31 August in high spirits with the political leaders adopting several declarations and action plans, and many of them calling for a revival of the importance of NAM, especially to protect the countries from foreign intervention and to build a new multipolar world.

The summit was already notable for the presence of about 25 presidents and prime ministers, and the vice presidents, ministers and other senior officials of another 95 member states, and representatives of 16 observer and guest countries.

If NAM has been searching for a new identity since the end of the Cold War, it seems to have found it in the fight against continued political and economic domination by the dominant countries, in reforming the United Nations and other global in-

stitutions, and enabling the South to have a fair say in global decision-making.

The summit's theme, 'Lasting Peace through Joint Global Governance', captured the spirit of the summit.

What helped was the high profile achieved by the summit. It was opened with a lengthy address by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei. The opening ceremony then heard from Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, UN General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Other high-profile speakers during the summit included the presidents of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Repub-

lic, Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe, and the prime ministers of Bhutan, Cambodia, Iraq, Lesotho, Nepal, Swaziland and Syria.

The summit had come under the spotlight before it started as a result of an attempt by the United States to dissuade Ban Ki-moon, and reportedly some high-level political leaders, from attending on the ground that it would legitimise the standing of Iran, on which the US and Europe have placed sanctions over the issue of its nuclear programme.

This US move seems to have boomeranged because the high-level attendance was seen as a snub to its attempt to isolate Iran.

## Nuclear threat

A highlight was the statement by Ayatollah Khamenei that Iran regards the use of nuclear, chemical and similar weapons as a 'great and unforgivable sin'.

He attacked the argument of countries possessing the largest nuclear arsenals for retaining them as a deterrent. This concept has to be rejected totally as nuclear arms do not provide security but pose a threat to all.

Calling for a nuclear weapons-free Middle East, Khamenei said this did not mean forgoing the right to peaceful use of nuclear power and production of nuclear fuel. He attacked some Western countries that own nuclear weapons and armed Israel with them but opposed Iran's pro-

duction of nuclear fuel for medical and other peaceful purposes. He put forward the motto, 'nuclear energy for all, and nuclear arms for none.'

Ban Ki-moon praised the Arab Spring, and criticised those countries that supplied arms to both sides in the Syrian conflict. He identified nuclear proliferation as the biggest threat and called on Iran as NAM president to play a role, and also asked Iran to build international confidence on the peaceful use of its nuclear programme.

President Morsi, whose country chaired NAM the past three years, said NAM had stuck to its principles and direction, and it must actively work to achieve the theme of peace through joint global governance. In a just world order, developing countries would escape from marginality and be part of power-sharing.

He added that democracy had to be implemented at a global level, that multilateralism without these principles was unacceptable. He also called for a solution for Palestine and action to stop the conflict in Syria.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said today's global governance structures were outmoded and NAM should take the lead in reforming these structures, including the UN Security Council, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. He called for South-South collaboration in solar energy, food security and skills development.

The Vice President of Venezuela, which will be chair of NAM after Iran's term, traced two previous phases of NAM's history: from 1961 to 1986 when NAM focused on the fight for decolonisation and development during the Cold War era, when NAM achieved great visibility; and from 1992 with the fall of the Soviet bloc and the attempt by the US to dominate a unipolar world, when NAM stressed the UN principles of sovereignty of states and non-intervention.

The time has come for a new phase to consolidate a multipolar world without empires and hegemonic powers, with respect for international law, peace and develop-



In his speech at the NAM summit, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said Iran regards the use of nuclear, chemical and similar weapons as a 'great and unforgivable sin'.



The Indian Prime Minister called at the NAM summit for NAM to take the lead in reforming outmoded global governance structures such as the UN Security Council (pic).

ment, he said, elaborating also on UN reform, and on the rapid reforms and regionalism in Latin America which has emerged as a powerful bloc.

The closing session saw the adoption of a 162-page Final Document, a short Tehran Declaration, a Tehran Plan of Action and two declarations on solidarity for Palestine and on Palestinian political prisoners.

The Tehran Declaration is mainly about measures to reform global governance. It also covers NAM's position on Palestine, racism, human rights, nuclear weapons and peaceful nuclear activities, terrorism, dialogue among religions and cultures, and the need for nations not to use extra-territorial or coercive measures.

The Final Document, formulated by NAM in New York, gives details

on the NAM position on global issues (especially UN reform), regional political issues, development, social and human rights issues. The action points of these are distilled into the Tehran Plan of Action.

In his closing speech, Iranian President Ahmadinejad said that all the leaders had emphasised that NAM should have its deserved position in the world, and preparation is needed so that NAM can play its important role in international relations. The commitment of NAM is to a better world based on justice and compassion. ◆

*Martin Khor is Executive Director of the South Centre, an intergovernmental policy think-tank of developing countries, and former Director of the Third World Network.*



# Non-aligned nations face new challenges

In this piece written before the Tehran summit, a former diplomat reflects on the past experience of the Non-Aligned Movement and considers the challenges ahead.

**Ernest Corea**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's decision to attend the sixteenth summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM16) in Tehran follows the precedent set by his predecessors and reaffirms the interlinked relationship between the UN and NAM.

NAM has been described as the largest politically oriented body in the world, second in membership to the Group of 77 and China which is concerned with economic issues. Most of NAM's members are UN members as well. Issues explored by NAM have been and are on the UN agenda too, and in several instances the positions taken by NAM, although sometimes opposed in other forums, have prevailed at the UN.

The Secretary-General's judgment that he should attend the summit effectively dismissed suggestions that he should not do so because of its location – which was determined and announced three years ago when the previous NAM summit was held in Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt).

Confirming the universality of the Secretary-General's role, and its independence from bilateral spats, Ban's spokesman said that he takes 'seriously' his 'responsibility and that of the UN to pursue diplomatic engagement with all of the world body's Member States, in the interest of peacefully addressing vital matters of peace and security.'

If that wasn't a sufficiently strong rejection of the view that Ban should distance himself from the NAM summit, the spokesman added: 'The Secretary-General looks forward to the Summit as an opportunity to work with the participating Heads of State and Government, including the host country, towards solutions on issues

that are central to the global agenda including follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development, disarmament, conflict prevention, and support for countries in transition.'

A hefty list, but an exemplary approach by the Secretary-General to the opportunities provided by the NAM summit. And yet, as the legendary Yogi Berra would have said: 'It's déjà vu all over again.'

## Many concerns

Thirty-three years ago, when the sixth NAM summit was held in Cuba, an assortment of hand-wringing observers considered the location of the event sinister. A participating foreign minister would tell any of his colleagues who cared to listen that they were all like passengers at a railway station who were about to board a train, but were being kept in the dark by the engine driver as to the destination he had chosen for them. Meanwhile, a head of government wrote to a colleague participating in the summit cautioning him that nothing should be done to hurt 'our friends the Americans.'

Adding to the concerns was a claim by political and media commentators that the Soviet Union had surreptitiously introduced a brigade of troops into Cuba in advance of the summit – for what purpose, nobody could tell. Groups of reporters covering the summit were searching in vain for the elusive brigade. It turned out that the Soviet troops had been stationed near Havana from 1972, and that their placement was with the full

knowledge of the US government.

A US diplomat later said that the 'brigade story' was a good example of how intelligence can be distorted and exploited by politicians to serve their own ends. In this case, the story did not serve anybody's ends because it spluttered out like the damp squib that it was.

Kurt Waldheim, UN Secretary-General at the time, was under pressure not to attend the Havana summit but, like Ban now, he went anyway, and delivered one of the opening addresses.

In a well-received speech, Waldheim noted: 'This conference – your conference, ladies and gentlemen – can effectively encourage international understanding and cooperation and the workings of preventive diplomacy in order to avert new perils to peace. It can also stimulate a clearer understanding of the fundamental proposition that the well-being of nations is interdependent.'

## Heavy burden

Now, with the current Secretary-General poised to attend the contemporary NAM summit, its location has again been causing uneasy rumbles, as the following exchange at the US State Department media briefing conducted by spokesperson Victoria Nuland on 22 August demonstrates:

'QUESTION: All right. Let's start with Iran. The UN has just announced that Secretary-General Ban will go to the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Tehran later this month. And I'm just wondering if you can think of a bigger display of diplomatic impotence than the head of the UN showing up in the capital of a coun-

try that has (a) defied all UN Security Council demands over its nuclear programme, and (b) called for the destruction of a UN member – another UN member, and (c) has, according to you guys – or is, according to you guys, the biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world.

‘MS. NULAND: Was there a question in there?’

‘QUESTION: Yeah. Is there – can you think of a bigger display of diplomatic impotence than the head of the UN showing up for this meeting?’

‘MS. NULAND: Well, we’ve talked about our view with regard to the NAM meeting a couple of times here, including earlier this week. I think I even said yesterday that we had concerns that Iran is going to manipulate this opportunity and the attendees, to try to deflect attention from its own failings. And we have the exact same concerns that you articulated, that this is a country that is in violation of all kinds of UN obligations and has been a destabilising force.

‘We hope that those who have chosen to attend, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, will make very strong points to those Iranians that they meet about their international obligations, about the opportunity that we’ve provided through the P-5+1 talks for them to begin to come clean on their nuclear programme and to solve this particular issue diplomatically, and about all the other expectations that we all have of them.

‘QUESTION: So does that mean you cannot think of a bigger sign of diplomatic impotence?’

‘MS. NULAND: Again, I don’t think I’m going to rise to your particular —.’

How great a burden today’s bureaucrats and media have to carry; almost as heavy as the ‘white man’s burden’ of years gone by.

### Continued relevance

A burden of a different kind will be foisted on NAM16 participants: a draft declaration that is 168 pages long and contains 696 paragraphs. Can NAM’s leaders, known for their prolix approach to speech-making, delve

into all the topics that interest them, and also move through the somewhat anodyne agenda drafted by the Iranians within the summit’s time span?

Will speakers in the plenary sessions of the summit be up to the challenge of observing the seven-minute limit that the hosts plan to impose on each of them? These are the sessions in which heads of state or government or, in a few instances, their foreign ministers standing in for them, speak in the assembly hall but to their audiences at home.

At NAM15, the plenary ended half an hour ahead of schedule. Mubarak’s Egypt obviously knew how to run a meeting. (Gavel in hand and the bulge of their small arms showing through their clothing, perhaps?) If the time-bound precedent set at NAM15 endures, the movement would have really turned a corner. It would then have more time to deal with really pressing issues, leaving conference trivia for committees, working groups, and the like.

Among the questions NAM has to address is the oft-repeated reservation about the relevance of non-alignment itself and thus of NAM, now that the Cold War has ended. This question presupposes that non-alignment was solely an attempt by post-colonial societies to steer clear of big-power competition and confrontation. It was partly that, of course, but it was more than that – which is why it remains relevant even with the Cold War laid to rest.

### Independent judgment

Some post-colonial societies opted to volunteer as Cold War recruits. Others, after years of their nations’ servitude and subservience, were not interested in fighting other people’s quarrels.

They had, for the most part, struggled over many years to win back the right to manage their domestic affairs. They were determined to protect the freedom to manage their foreign affairs as well.

Thus, it is fair to say that non-alignment as a concept and as a policy is an extension of national independ-

ence into the arena of international relations. Even (Tito’s) Yugoslavia, a strong exponent of non-alignment, although it did not share the colonial experience of, for instance, India, wished to uphold its right to make foreign policy decisions untrammelled by the dictates or desires of external forces.

India’s Jawaharlal Nehru, as always, spoke with clarity on this matter as far back as in 1946 when he said: ‘I am not prepared even as an individual, much less as the foreign minister of this country, to give up my right of independent judgment to anybody else in other countries. That is the essence of our policy.’

NAM is a coalition of nations subscribing to the foreign policy of independent judgment. Within that coalition, member countries seek consensus – the closest possible convergence of views – and not head-counting, on matters of mutual interest and of concern to the world at large.

In this mode, NAM countries have influenced international thinking on many issues including but not limited to: apartheid, decolonisation, wars of national liberation, withdrawal of foreign forces from Indochina, sovereignty over natural resources, food security, and the global development agenda.

Another set of issues worthy of consideration leading to independent judgment, fresh thinking and practical policies have been listed by the UN Secretary-General (see above). If NAM16 can grapple with these issues effectively, providing the wider global community (the host country included) with new insights, Ban’s visit to the summit would be truly worthwhile – and the people of Tehran will deserve the five-day holiday they have been granted while NAM16 is in business. – *IDN-InDepthNews* ♦

*Ernest Corea has served as Sri Lanka’s ambassador to Canada, Cuba, Mexico, and the US. He was Chairman of the Commonwealth Select Committee on the media and development, Editor of the Ceylon Daily News and the Ceylon Observer, and was for a time Features Editor and Foreign Affairs columnist of the Singapore Straits Times. He is Global Editor of IDN-InDepthNews and a member of its editorial board as well as President of the Media Task Force of the Global Cooperation Council.*



# Non-Aligned Movement: Not a dead horse

In taking issue with the claim of the Western media that the Non-Aligned Movement is a 'dead horse', a former ambassador of Bangladesh asserts that the Tehran summit and its achievements attest to its continuing vitality.

**Mahmood Hasan**

THE 16th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was held in Tehran on 26-31 August. Iran is now the chair of the largest political grouping of countries in the world after the United Nations. It will hold the chair until 2015 when Venezuela hosts the 17th summit.

The 16th summit was hosted by Iran at a time when tension is highest in the region. The tension is due to two developments. First, for the past several months the US and Israel have been openly threatening Iran with war over its nuclear programme and have imposed crippling economic sanctions, trying to isolate Tehran – calling it part of the 'axis of evil'. Second, the uprising in Syria since March 2011 has degenerated into a bloody conflict due to outside interference and threatens wider conflict in the region.

NAM has 120 member states and 17 states as observers. Member states of the Movement comprise two-thirds of the UN membership and account for 55% of the world population. Thirty-five heads of state and government attended the summit, while other member states were represented by ranking envoys, mostly foreign ministers.

However, Tehran's most favoured guest was Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the UN. As is customary, Ban attended the summit, despite stiff opposition from Washington and Tel Aviv. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had called Ban and asked him to cancel his visit. Netanyahu attacked the NAM summit, stating that it was 'a stain on humanity.' Ban's presence has put the US and Israel on the retreat on the diplomatic front.

On the concluding day, the sum-

mit adopted the Final Document, which contained some 700 paragraphs covering the viewpoints of the member states. Iran prepared the draft, which was amended as it went through the Senior Official Meeting and the Ministerial Meeting.

The summit emphasised that a peaceful solution is needed without any foreign intervention in Syria; called for the establishment of the state of Palestine; condemned unilateral sanctions on Iran; stressed peaceful use of nuclear energy for all and called for nuclear disarmament; called for reform of the UN system; and called for North-South and South-South cooperation.

The non-combative tone and contents of the summit's outcome documents abundantly demonstrate that the Movement wants to remain independent from big-power influences.

## Debates and disagreement

The conference was not without its share of energetic debates and disagreement – as is normal in such summits.

Mohammed Morsi, the newly elected president of Egypt, chair of the 15th summit, was present in Tehran to hand over the NAM gavel to the new chair of the Movement. In his allocation, Morsi embarrassed his hosts by supporting the Syrian opposition against President Bashar al-Assad. Clearly Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood (Sunni) leader, is ideologically opposed to Assad (Alawite-Shia), the Ba'athist president of Syria. Morsi's speech prompted a walkout by the Syrian delegation from the ple-

nary. Iran, a strong ally of Assad, was visibly annoyed.

It was the first visit by an Egyptian president to Iran for 33 years. Iran, fresh from the Islamic revolution, broke off diplomatic ties with Egypt in 1979 when Egypt signed the peace treaty with Israel. Morsi's visit to Iran was seen as an indication of rapprochement between Cairo and Tehran.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made his guests uncomfortable when he in his inaugural address termed the US as a 'hegemonic meddler' and Israel as a regime of 'Zionist wolves'.

Ban Ki-moon was irritated when Khamenei said Iran 'is never seeking nuclear weapons' and accused the UN Security Council, under US pressure, of exerting an 'overt dictatorship' over the world.

Ban in his remarks said that Iran needs to 'fully comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions and thoroughly cooperate with the IAEA.' He even went further, saying that 'a war of words can quickly spiral into a war of violence.' Ban's statement came in for sharp criticism by the media of the South for failing to remain neutral.

The summit expressed solidarity with Iran – it will certainly make Washington and Israel cautious. The warmongers in the West will now have to pause before undertaking any military adventure in Iran or Syria.

The summit was a convenient opportunity for Iran and it has used the occasion to break its diplomatic isolation and bolster its international standing. The presence of more than 100 leaders at Tehran demonstrated that Iran is not a threat to world peace or a pariah state.

Iran is going through a severe economic recession – its oil revenues are dwindling because of the economic sanctions. Holding the summit had undoubtedly cost its exchequer a huge amount of money, which it can ill afford, some Iranian journalists commented.

The Americans have always looked upon NAM with suspicion and hatred. One wonders why Washington never sought to become an observer at the Movement's summits.

Iran's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi announced that a temporary NAM secretariat will be established in Tehran. If it proves successful during the next three years a permanent secretariat will be set up.

The Troika – comprising past chair Egypt, current chair Iran and the next chair Venezuela – should use the temporary secretariat to revitalise the Movement and make it a forceful voice in all international fora, particularly the United Nations.

It was interesting to read the media reports from the First World (West & North) and those from the Third World (East & South). The arguments and debates at the summit were sarcastically hyped by the Western media to portray the summit as a flop. The Western media described the Movement as a 'dead horse'.

The Third World media, on the other hand, glorified the summit as a victory for Iran and a slap in the face of the West. It was Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who aptly commented: 'The Non-Aligned Movement is not meant to slap any country.'

World politics has undergone massive changes since the Bandung Conference in 1955, when NAM was conceived. It played an active role in the United Nations during the Cold War days. The Movement stands for solidarity and is still important for the nations of the South and the East.

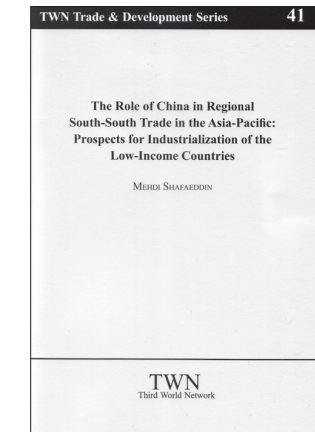
Considering what the summit achieved, the Movement is not a dead horse. ♦

*Mahmood Hasan is a former Bangladeshi Ambassador and Secretary. This article was first published in The Daily Star (Bangladesh) (6 September 2012).*

## The Role of China in Regional South-South Trade in the Asia-Pacific: Prospects for Industrialization of the Low-Income Countries

By Mehdi Shafaeddin

BASED on his proposed alternative theoretical framework for South-South trade as a vehicle for industrialization and development and refuting the "decoupling" thesis – that is, that East Asian countries are decoupled from the business cycle in developed countries – the author analyzes the merits and shortcomings of China's regional trade with its partners. Moreover, considering the growing weight of China in the global production network and international trade, he proposes policies for the industrialization and development of the partner countries in the context of strengthening China's role as a growth "pole". He suggests, inter alia, the need for industrial collaboration among the low-income countries of the region – which benefit less than others from the dynamics of the Chinese economy as a "hub" – complemented by adjustment assistance by China and the newly industrializing economies (NIEs). He also proposes technological cooperation among China's trading partners which are currently involved in production sharing in a limited number of electrical and electronic products for export to third markets in developed



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countries. Such cooperation would be aimed at upgrading their industrial structure and reducing their vulnerability to changes in the economic strategy of China and to the business cycle in the developed countries.

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# Non-aligned summit belies isolation of Iran

The fact that more than 100 members of the Non-Aligned Movement chose to attend the Tehran summit and express their solidarity with Iran on the nuclear issue in the summit's final communique is testament that the US-led moves to isolate the country have failed.

**Dilip Hiro**

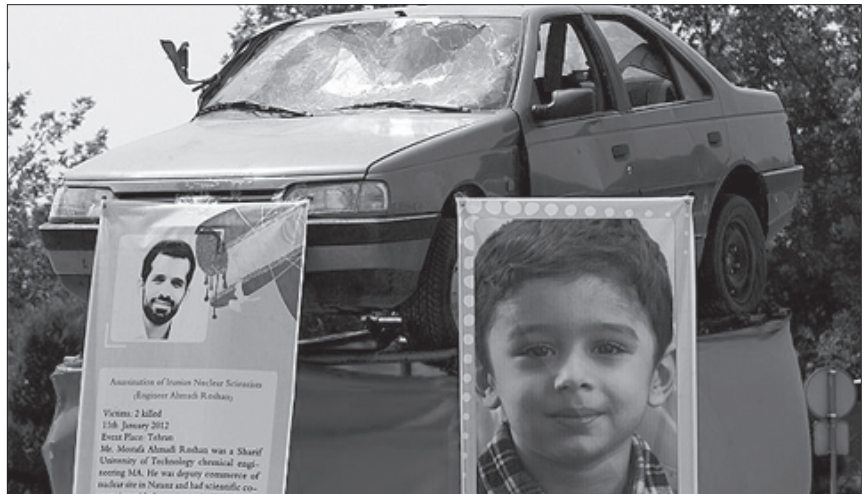
AS hosts of the 16th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran, Iranian officials tried to advance their agenda. Top of their list was to secure NAM's endorsement of their right to peaceful nuclear energy. Next was to get NAM to condemn foreign armed interference in Syria, a strategic ally of Iran since the Islamic revolution of 1979. The summit's final communique supported Iran's stance on the nuclear issue. But it made no mention of backing for the beleaguered regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Iran's officials also saw an opportunity to present their country as a victim of international terrorism, not perpetrator. To that end, they displayed the cars wrecked in the killings of five Iranian nuclear scientists – widely attributed to agents of Mossad, the Israeli secret service – outside the conference venue.

By the summit's end, Iran could claim that US-led efforts to isolate it diplomatically and economically with unilateral sanctions had failed and that it had made progress in presenting itself as a victim of international terrorism rather than perpetrator.

In the process, however, Iran had to endure jarring criticism from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UN watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on its failure to come clean on past nuclear activity.

The mere fact of Iran hosting the NAM summit – attended by all 120 members, a quarter represented by their heads of state, but also most of its 21 observers – contradicts the



**Cars wrecked in the killings of five Iranian nuclear scientists – widely attributed to agents of the Israeli secret service – were displayed outside the NAM conference venue.**

Western-inspired notion of its diplomatic isolation. For the next three years, its leader will act as the secretary-general of NAM, based at the United Nations. In 2015 chairmanship will pass to Venezuela, another bête noire of Washington.

Before the summit, both the United States and Israel publicly urged Ban to boycott the event, asserting that the Iranian government would manipulate this opportunity to deflect attention from its own failings in human rights and cooperation with the IAEA on its nuclear programme. Ban ignored the advice, replying that as the UN secretary-general he had 'a mandate to engage with all the member states of the United Nations'.

Iran has a positive trade balance with 92 of the 179 countries that traded with it during the fiscal year ending March 2012. For example, in defiance of Washington's call to end purchases of Iran's oil, India imported Iranian petroleum worth \$12.5 billion while exporting \$2.5 billion worth of

goods to the Islamic Republic. To rectify the imbalance, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh brought a delegation of 250 businessmen and industrialists with him to confer with Iranian counterparts while he attended the NAM summit.

Iran is the second largest source of imported Middle Eastern oil for India after Saudi Arabia. Given the urgent need for energy security to ensure robust GDP growth, Delhi has no intention of accepting the extraterritorial application of US law imposing unilateral economic sanctions on Iran. It abides only by UN Security Council resolutions. That's also the case with China and Russia, which attended the NAM gathering as observers.

Much to the disappointment of Western capitals, the summit's final communique, published 31 August, supported Iran's claim that under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons it signed in 1968, it has the right to peaceful nuclear en-

ergy as well as the right to ownership of a full nuclear fuel cycle, including uranium enrichment, a contentious issue. The document stated that these rights belong to all NAM members.

Iran gained the unanimous backing of NAM attendees after a speech by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on 30 August. 'The Islamic Republic of Iran considers the use of nuclear, chemical and similar weapons as a great and unforgivable sin,' he declared. 'We proposed the idea of the Middle East free of nuclear weapons, and we are committed to it. Our motto is nuclear power for all and nuclear weapons for none.'

Before Khamenei's speech, the families of the assassinated Iranian nuclear scientists were seated in the front row, holding photos of the victims. Equally effective was the organisers' decision to give all NAM delegations free access to the Natanz nuclear facility where uranium enrichment is taking place.

### The Syria question

Khamenei said nothing about the conflict in Syria, which has claimed the lives of nearly 20,000 civilians and 8,000 members of the security forces. He failed to refer even to his government's proposal for a three-month truce between the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and the rebels as a preamble to talks between the warring sides, which had secured the backing of 30 states three weeks earlier at the Tehran Consultative Conference on Syria.

Mohammed Morsi, popularly elected president of Egypt since June, exploited this chink in Khamenei's armour. Asserting that the world had a 'moral duty' to support Syria's rebels, Morsi said, 'Our solidarity with the Syrian people against an oppressive regime that has lost its legitimacy is... a political and strategic necessity.' He called on Iran to participate in a four-member contact group including Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia – all three being Sunni states – to mediate an end to the Syrian crisis. He left out Iraq, where the popularly elected government is led by



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon meeting with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ahead of the NAM summit. By the summit's end, Iran could claim that US-led efforts to isolate it diplomatically had failed.

Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki, who famously described himself as Shia first and Iraqi second. Morsi's pro-Sunni bias was unmistakable.

But before Iran could officially respond to his proposal, Syrian rebels summarily rejected Iran's participation in any peace efforts. So, too, did the United States, which two months earlier had threatened to boycott the meeting called by Kofi Annan, the UN's special envoy on Syria, in Geneva if Iran were invited to attend.

The Barack Obama administration doesn't share Ban's view that Tehran has a key role in ending Syria's civil war. In the upcoming US presidential contest, Obama faces Republican Mitt Romney, who agrees with Israel's plans to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. Given this, Obama is unlikely to soften his hostility toward Iran.

Ban used his speech to prove that his diplomatic integrity wasn't compromised by participation in the NAM summit, describing Iran's verbal threats against Israel and its denial of the Holocaust as 'outrageous'. During interaction with students and teachers at Tehran's School of International Relations, he urged Iran's top officials to release opposition leaders and political activists to create a level playing field before the presidential poll next year.

In meetings with Khamenei and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ban said that Iran should comply with IAEA and UN

Security Council resolutions and do more to assure the world that their nuclear programme was for peaceful purposes. Ban was referring to the latest IAEA report noting that Iran failed to give inspectors access to a site at Parchin, southeast of Tehran, believed to be a facility for testing high explosives.

Iran's behaviour is open to different interpretations: It intends to keep Western opponents guessing about its capabilities, a strategy that has served it well so far. Or its policymakers think that, when the West is waging economic and diplomatic war against their nation, cooperating more than what's absolutely essential with the IAEA could be construed as weakness.

With the NAM summit unanimously supporting Iran's right to enriching uranium, its leaders do not want to be seen as weaklings. At the very least, they estimate that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be forced to rethink his plan to stage airstrikes against Iran's nuclear facilities, openly opposed not only by Israel's former and serving defence and intelligence chiefs, but also by Obama. ♦

*Dilip Hiro is the author of The Iranian Labyrinth (Nation Books, New York). His most recent book is Apocalyptic Realm: Jihadists in South Asia, published in April by Yale University Press, New Haven and London. This article is reproduced from YaleGlobal Online (yaleglobal.yale.edu).*

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# Still relevant after all these years

A former editor of a leading Indian newspaper contends that for India and other developing countries, solidarity within the Non-Aligned Movement is necessary not merely to preserve their 'strategic autonomy'. It is essential so that they can preserve the strategic space to secure a higher level of political, economic and technological development.

**KN Hari Kumar**

WHAT was most significant about the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit that was held in Tehran recently was that almost all of NAM's 120 members gathered there in the face of attempts by the US, allied Western nations and Israel to pressure and isolate Iran to abandon parts of its nuclear programme. Great pressure was even brought to bear on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon by the US and Israel not to attend, but the mild and generally pliant Ban could not bring himself to abandon the precedent set by his predecessors and skip the event.

The attempt to isolate Iran failed completely. Hosting the summit was a great confidence booster for Iran, which was able to present its case to the largest international political organisation of developing nations. It showcased the lethal attacks on its scientists, suspected to be by Israel's intelligence agency, Mossad. In its final declaration the summit unanimously supported Iran's right to develop all aspects of its nuclear programme for peaceful purposes within the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and criticised attempts to isolate Iran and punish it with unilateral sanctions. Even though NAM may not have the political, economic or military strength to successfully resist those powerful nations, it cannot be doubted that its support undermines the legitimacy of sanctions, especially those outside the UN framework, as well as diverse forms of undercover sabotage and killings by Israel with or without US involvement, including any military attack if it were to take place.

It is in this context that the decision of the Indian Prime Minister to resist US pressure to at most send a low-powered delegation with junior

ministers and attend the summit himself has to be seen. Even though he made no mention of the Iran nuclear issue at the summit, his very presence was seen as expressing the Indian government's support for Iran and for NAM more generally. Further, there was considerable warmth in his meeting with Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei. Besides, the Indian Foreign Minister met his Iranian counterpart ahead of the summit to develop bilateral, especially economic and business, ties. Unsurprisingly, it was reported in the media that the US and Israel 'frown[ed] at India hobnobbing with Iran.'

On the other issue on the international agenda, the Prime Minister spoke out forthrightly against 'external intervention' in the Syrian crisis, which, he said, would 'exacerbate the suffering of ordinary citizens'. He added that 'NAM should urge all parties to recommit themselves to resolving the crisis peacefully through a Syrian-led inclusive political process'. This was directly in opposition to the US stand and actions on the issue. But NAM could not come out with a clear stand because of many internal differences, especially among the Arab and Islamic nations, and the final declaration made no mention of the issue. This showed some of the limitations of NAM in areas involving conflicts between and within its member nations.

Is NAM still relevant in the post-Cold War world, in an era where the US and allied Western and other rich nations are politically, economically and strategically more dominant than ever? NAM is routinely derided by Western media and policymakers,

who employ phrases like 'a relic of the Cold War' and sneer that after this 'talkfest, the world will not have changed'. US policymakers have explicitly stated that they would like to see India out of NAM altogether and even abandon the concept of non-alignment in its foreign policy thinking. Instead, they would like India to join their alliance of democracies against non-democracies, which in their opinion is the defining agenda in the present global scenario. Another idea being advanced is 'multi-alignment', that is, participation in diverse international groupings of nations – the G20, G77, IBSA, RIC, BRICS, BASIC, among others – for promoting different national interests.

The reasons are not far to seek. Even from its pre-origins in the Bandung Conference of former colonial nations in 1955, NAM has meant much more than a matter of non-alignment with the two Cold War blocs. It was also conceived as the voice of the former colonies and poor nations in a world overwhelmingly dominated by the rich Western nations. The G77, which takes up the cause of the developing countries in international fora on economic and development issues, was complementary to NAM. Solidarity within NAM provides strength to its member nations. Hence, NAM has that flavour of anti-imperialism associated with its origin and history which the rich and powerful nations would like to see forgotten.

In such a context, what should be NAM's role in Indian foreign policy? The Prime Minister in his address reaffirmed the continuing relevance of NAM. And he emphasised that NAM was important 'to preserve our strategic space'. A recent policy perspective document developed by a panel



of 'independent thinkers', some closely linked to the Indian government, titled 'Non-Alignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty First Century', argues that the objective of non-alignment is to preserve and enhance the nation's 'strategic autonomy'. Interestingly, the phrases 'Non-Aligned Movement' and 'G77' do not find any place in it. Non-alignment has been redefined in exclusively Indian national terms to enhance its independence or sovereignty and provide room for manoeuvre amidst diverse pressures in the international arena to promote its ambitions and interests.

What has been decisively abandoned is India's solidarity with the developing countries and mobilising them on the basis of common interests and agenda. This perspective has become more influential in Indian policy circles especially after the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the initiation domestically of radical private-sector-oriented economic reforms at the start of the 1990s. However, the founding fathers of NAM saw the two objectives – national independence and the solidarity of developing countries – as profoundly interdependent for the former colonies which were embarking on the path of development in a deeply unequal world. Can they be separated in an age when there is no communist bloc to provide a countervailing force to the almost complete dominance of the rich and powerful nations?

In recent decades, the Indian government seems to have had more faith in the UN as a forum to protect its independence and interests. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist allies, that institution has been almost completely dominated by the powerful nations. The US, long hostile to many of its associated organisations, has been openly disregarding, if not downright contemptuous, of it, even though its West European allies are keener to work within its framework. Whether, in the context of lack of solidarity among the developing nations, the UN will be able to provide a check on those powerful nations is doubt-

ful.

This change over the last quarter-century in the Indian perspective on NAM has to be seen in the context of its revised foreign policy agenda being almost exclusively focused on transforming the nation into a great power. The way towards this objective, it is felt, is to start thinking big, join the rich man's club and enter into friendly relations with the rich and powerful nations for economic, hi-tech and military benefits and a place at the high table where the great powers decide the fate of humankind. Hence, one of its chief priorities is to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Another, for the present at least, is to be allowed hegemony in the South Asian region. To advance this agenda, friendship with the most technologically and economically advanced and militarily powerful nation, the United States, is seen as the most promising path.

But India wants also to maintain its 'strategic autonomy', 'to preserve our strategic space'. Hence the continuing ambivalence and shifting stands. On the Iran nuclear issue, India voted in the Security Council for sanctions for Iran's violations of its non-proliferation commitments. But after that it has resisted additional sanctions by the US-led Western nations. Also, it tried to resist attempts to restrict its oil purchases from Iran, before ultimately succumbing to US pressure. It has also actively tried to increase its bilateral trade and economic ties and maintain more friendly political relations with Iran.

It is undoubtedly true that developing friendly relations with the rich and powerful nations has benefitted India economically in recent decades, especially in IT outsourcing and IT-enabled services. But for India and other developing countries to advance beyond the advantages of low labour and currency costs, raw materials, agro products and areas which the developed countries would like to abandon and leave to them, and develop more advanced technological and higher-value products and services which alone can take their economies and citizens to the next stage of

income and wealth, they will have to develop their own technologies and economies. For this a self-reliant strategy is required. But if and when their products and services start to compete even a little with those of the developed countries, the developing countries are likely to meet with resistance of diverse kinds from those countries. Hence, to go beyond even a modest level of development and prosperity, let alone to become the superpower that national policymakers increasingly want India to be, an independent foreign and strategic policy is essential.

However, it is not just for this that solidarity within NAM is required. There is also the increasingly aggressive interventionism on the part of the advanced Western nations in the first decade of the 21st century which seems to be worrying the Indian government. This has been seen not just in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also lately in Libya and now Syria and Iran. The reasons given range from possession of weapons of mass destruction to human rights abuses. The fear is undoubtedly whether India will come under increasing pressure from the latest version of 'the white man's burden', which now goes under the name of the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine that purports to protect the human rights of citizens of developing countries from the abusive actions or failures to act of their governments.

In conclusion, it can be said that go-it-alone non-alignment 'to preserve strategic autonomy' may not be adequate. To preserve that strategic space and to develop technologically and economically, India and other developing countries need to develop solidarity within NAM, the G77 and other organisations in a more committed manner over the long term. Otherwise their political, economic and technological independence and progression to a higher stage of economic development may be at risk. ♦

*KN Hari Kumar is a former editor of the Deccan Herald. The above is a revised version of an article which first appeared in The Hindu (25 September 2012).*

# The new Non-Aligned Movement: Multipolar and regional

In this sketch of the historical background to the Non-Aligned Movement, *Vijay Prashad* contends that the emergent politics of the movement will be defined by multipolarity and regionalism.

BORN in 1961, the Non-Aligned Movement is now over 50 years old, a decade or so younger than the United Nations. Unwilling to remain hostages to nuclear warfare and to nuclear détente, the new states of the 1950s wanted to chart out an independent path – not as proxies for an American-Soviet Cold War. The five major initiators of the movement, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia, had either just emerged from colonial rule or broken away from alliances that appeared one-sided to them. It was this independence that they named ‘non-alignment’. After the Non-Aligned Movement summit in 1961, India’s Jawaharlal Nehru and Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah travelled to Moscow while Indonesia’s Ahmed Sukarno and Mali’s Modibo Keita went to Washington, carrying an ‘Appeal for Peace’, asking the major powers to return to the negotiation table. Peace was their watchword, because, without a reduction in threats and arms spending, social development would be severely compromised.

The movement was part of the ensemble of the Third World Project, which included the bloc of the South in the United Nations (the G77) and the experiments in new kinds of social development in the Global South. It thrived in its first two decades, building to a fever pitch of expectation with the 1973 UN resolution for the crafting of a New International Economic Order. This was to be ‘non-alignment’ in the domain of politics and economics.

Ten years after the New International Economic Order, at the 7th Non-Aligned Movement summit in New Delhi, anxiety filled the movement – storm clouds were on the ho-



The first Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries was held in Belgrade in 1961. The Non-Aligned Movement arose out of the desire of the new states of the 1950s to chart an independent path.

rizon, and many delegates saw them. The previous year, Mexico had fallen into bankruptcy. In Boston, the head of the World Bank (and former head of Bank of America) Tom Clausen said, ‘For the first time since the Second World War, the momentum of Third World development has, for the most part, been broken.’ Forty-two countries were locked in repayment negotiations for debt payments they could not sustain. ‘The IMF [International Monetary Fund] either eases off and loses credibility,’ said a senior US official, ‘or it insists and the debtor stops paying.’ The IMF insisted, countries declared bankruptcy and had to accede to Structural Adjustment Programmes that stripped them of their independence so as to regain financial liquidity.

The debt crisis of the 1980s broke the back of the Third World Project, and it shattered the confidence of the Non-Aligned Movement. The institution, which represents two-thirds of the world’s governments, continued

to function – but barely. Non-alignment as a guiding doctrine became fodder for nostalgia, as indebted countries began to forge links with a resurgent West in light of the collapse of the East. Bilateral free trade agreements with the US and Europe came alongside IMF programmes for austerity; military deals that allowed US bases on formerly proud anti-colonial soil provided the infrastructure for the emergence of US primacy. The Non-Aligned Movement met, but it did not propose anything.

The tide began to turn in the early 2000s. In 2003, the movement’s then chair, South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki, attempted to create a peaceful solution against the US rush to war against Iraq. Massive street protests across the South (and in the North) seemed to be on the side of a peaceful settlement (including the 20 March protest in Egypt, which emboldened the antiwar activists toward Kefaya, a core part of the anti-Mubarak resistance from 2004 to 2011). The US pressured

South Africa to expel Iraq's ambassador – but failed. It did, however, go to war, disregarding the word from the street and from the Non-Aligned Movement.

In 2003 again, the US and the Europeans refused to honestly discuss development and trade. They insisted that subsidies to Northern agriculture did not violate their own free trade nostrums. This incensed the South at the Cancun meeting of the World Trade Organisation. Brazil, China, India, South Africa, the group of the Least Developed Countries and the African, Caribbean and Pacific bloc resisted pressure from the World Trade Organisation Director-General Pascal Lamy to 'steer' the organisation to a 'compromise', which would mean victory to the North. The South prevailed, and Lamy lamented, 'The World Trade Organisation remains a medieval organisation,' which meant that it was not pliable to Northern direction.

### New intellectual agenda

The experience of the Iraq War and Cancun led to the creation of a new group, the IBSA Dialogue, which included one country from each of the Southern continents: India, Brazil, and South Africa. Complementarities in these countries led them to increase trade among themselves, and to work together at international forums for their interests and that of the South in general.

Over the course of several meetings, the dialogue framed a new intellectual agenda, now not so much non-alignment as regionalism and multipolarity. Brazil brought the Latin American experience to the table – notably the process that led, in 2004, to the creation of the trade bloc, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, and, in 2010, to the creation of the political bloc, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. The 14th Non-Aligned Movement summit in Havana in 2006 saw more discussion of regionalism than at any meeting previously. There was renewed buoyancy as several countries had already come to this idea independently.



**Regionalism and multipolarity became the central intellectual themes of the BRICS grouping which comprises Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Picture shows the leaders of the BRICS states at their 2012 summit in New Delhi.**

Regionalism and multipolarity became the central intellectual themes of the BRICS, when China and Russia joined Brazil, India and South Africa to create a new major world grouping. BRICS accounts for 40% of the world's global GDP.

Regionalism and multipolarity were at the heart of the 16th Non-Aligned Movement summit. Side deals enhanced regional economic development, and provided the basis for regional political alliances without US primacy. For example, on this summit's sidelines, Afghanistan, India and Iran began a process to shore up their mutual links through the southeastern Iranian port of Chabahar. US-occupied Afghanistan imports 50% of its oil from Iran, despite US and European sanctions. Parochial US aims to isolate Iran are simply not feasible in a multipolar world. Solutions to the Syrian crisis have defeated the US and the Europeans, but a new regional opening from Egypt, via the Contact Group, offered a glimmer of hope. It is true that Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi seemed sectarian in his speech at the summit. Equally, Iran is eager for a rapprochement with Egypt, not only to undo 30 years of mutual disregard, but also to be a player in the Arab Spring. The regional advantages are apparent to these countries, which is why even Saudi Arabia and Turkey are willing to become part of

this process. They need each other. As clients of US primacy, they have gained very little – only a threat of regional war. As regional actors committed to regional solutions, there is, at least, hope.

'Non-aligned' is simply the historical word in the movement's name. But it does not define its politics. Its emergent politics are no longer for non-alignment but for regionalism and multipolarity. The IMF predicts that in 2016, the US will no longer be the world's largest economy. Debt crises in the North and austerity solutions will equally put pressure on its ability to foist its military power across the planet. The Chinese, who will have the largest economy, are committed to multipolarity. This is why the new intellectual orientation of the Non-Aligned Movement – regionalism and multipolarity – is actually much more realistic than a reassertion of Northern domination. There will not be another American Century. We are at the dawn of a new multipolar experiment. ♦

*Vijay Prashad is the author of Arab Spring, Libyan Winter (AK Press, 2012 and Turkish edition, Yordam Kitap, 2012). His book The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World (2007) was chosen as the Best Nonfiction book by the Asian American Writers' Workshop in 2008 and won the Muzaffar Ahmed Book Award in 2009. The above article was originally published in the weekly print edition of Egypt Independent (www.egyptindependent.com).*



# The Tehran Declaration

The following declaration issued by the Tehran summit at its conclusion on 31 August sums up the summit's perspective and demands on some key international issues.

WE, the Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, gathered at our XVI Conference held in Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran, on 30-31 August 2012, undertook a review of the international situation with a view to making an effective contribution to the solution of the major problems of concern to all NAM Member States and to entire Humankind, and,

*Inspired* by the vision, principles and objectives of the Non-Aligned Movement, articulated in Bandung (1955) and Belgrade (1961), and guided by the Declaration of Purposes and Principles in our efforts to achieve a world of peace, equality, cooperation and well-being for all, *drawing upon* the Movement's experience in the past and its great potential today,

*Reaffirming* the lasting validity and the continuing relevance of the NAM vision, principles and objectives in the contemporary international situation,

*Strengthened* by our past achievements in the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, apartheid and all forms of foreign intervention, interference, aggression, occupation, domination or hegemony, and staying away from power alliances and their confrontations, continue to be fundamental elements in the policy of non-alignment,

*Renewing* our commitment to the NAM principles and objectives and our pledge to strive to make a constructive contribution towards building a new pattern of international relations based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, cooperation among nations and the right to equality of all States,

*Continuing to uphold* the principles of sovereignty and the sovereign equality of States, territorial integrity, self-determination and non-interven-

tion in the internal affairs of any State; *taking* effective measures for the prevention and suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of peace, to defend, promote and encourage the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered; *refraining* in international relations from the threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence of any State or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter,

## **Declare that:**

1. To build a fair, inclusive, transparent and effective system of joint global governance, based on justice and equitable participation of all countries and to address present challenges and risks stemming from global security threats, environmental hazards, climate change, migration, contagious diseases, extreme poverty, among others, the NAM Member States should coordinate their positions and join force in pressing on the interests of the developing world. To do so, a number of priorities are as follows:

a. Global governance is broad in scope and encompasses many issues of global interest and concerns than merely economic issues. The world faces challenges in security, social and environmental fields. International peace and security still continue to be high on the priority scale of many countries. The current international decision-making architecture in the fields of peace and security is outdated and much more resistant to any change.

b. The United Nations as the universal and inclusive multilateral body should play a fundamental role in the institutional and legal framework of global governance. Thus, the United Nations could and should have a ma-

ajor role in efforts undertaken to find common solutions to common problems, including a coordinating role among all international and regional agencies. Nonetheless, for the UN to remain at the forefront of any discussion on global governance, focus should further be on its strengthening and modernising. Towards this end, it is especially essential to revitalise the UN General Assembly, including in the area of international peace and security, and reform the UN Security Council to reflect the realities of today's world.

c. The growing importance of developing countries is yet to be sufficiently reflected in the governance structures of existing international key decision-making bodies. Key decisions concerning the issues of global governance can no longer be the preserve of a small group of countries. Policies are being made across a broadening range of issues, which affect all in world politics. Thus, it is imperative that developing countries could have a greater voice and participation in the major institutions, which coordinate policies at the international level.

d. Crises in the past several years have exposed the shortcomings and failures of international financial institutions, which adversely affect their ability to address crises and achieve adequate macroeconomic policy coordination. As they were established following World War II, they fail to address appropriately current world challenges and, therefore, adversely affect developing countries.

e. In the international community not every nation shares similar values and opinions. To live in peace and harmony the diversity within the global society should be acknowledged and respected. Thus, the attempts to impose values on other members of the international community should

be thwarted.

2. Occupation of Palestine lies at the heart of the protracted crisis situation in the Middle East. Any solution to this crisis requires the termination of the occupation, crimes and violations committed by Israel, the occupying power, restoration of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of their independent and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. The restoration of the national rights of the Palestinian people is a basic prerequisite for the establishment of an equitable, comprehensive and lasting peace in the area.

3. Racism and racial discrimination are affronts to human dignity and equality, and the resurgence of contemporary and new forms of such abhorrent crimes in various parts of the world is a matter for grave concern. Thus, it is imperative to address with greater resolve and political will all forms and manifestation of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance including new forms of slavery and trafficking in persons, wherever they occur.

4. All human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and human rights issues must be addressed through a constructive, non-confrontational, non-politicised, non-selective and dialogue-based as well as cooperative approach, in a fair, equal and balanced manner, with objectivity, respect for cultural diversity and national sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, taking into account the political, historical, social, religious and cultural particularities of each country. Special attention should be paid to the rights of the youth and women and the way be paved for building capacity in this respect and facilitating their participation in the politico-social and economic processes.

5. Nuclear weapons are the most inhumane weapons ever conceived. The maintenance of strategic and tactical nuclear stockpile and their continued modernisation, as well as new military doctrines setting the rationale for their possible use, particularly against non-nuclear weapon states

(NNWS), represent the greatest threat to humankind. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) did not provide a right for nuclear weapon states to keep their nuclear arsenals indefinitely. States Parties to the NPT have obligations under Article VI of the NPT to destroy all nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework, which is yet to be fulfilled. It is imperative to conclude a comprehensive convention on nuclear disarmament.

6. All states should be able to enjoy the basic and inalienable right to the development, research, production and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, without any discrimination and in conformity with their respective international legal obligations. Therefore, nothing should be interpreted in a way to inhibit or restrict the right of states to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. States' choices and decisions, in the field of peaceful uses of nuclear technology and their fuel cycle policies, including those of the Islamic Republic of Iran, must be respected.

7. The inviolability of peaceful nuclear activities should be upheld and any attack or threat of attack against peaceful nuclear facilities operational or under construction amounts to a serious danger to human beings and the environment, and constitutes a grave violation of international law, of the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, and of regulations of the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]. There is a pressing need for a comprehensive multilaterally negotiated legal instrument prohibiting attacks, or threat of attacks on nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

8. Non-Aligned countries agree to refrain from recognising, adopting or implementing extra-territorial or unilateral coercive measures or laws, including unilateral economic sanctions, other intimidating measures, and arbitrary travel restrictions, that seek to exert pressure on Non-Aligned Countries – threatening their sovereignty and independence, and their freedom of trade and investment – and prevent them from exercising their

right to decide, by their own free will, their own political, economic and social systems, where such measures or laws constitute flagrant violations of the UN Charter, international law, the multilateral trading system as well as the norms and principles governing friendly relations among States; and in this regard, they agree to oppose and condemn these measures or laws and their continued application, persevere with efforts to effectively reverse them and urge other States to do likewise, as called for by the General Assembly and other UN organs; agree to request States applying these measures or laws to revoke them fully and immediately.

9. All acts of terrorism, in all their forms and manifestations, wherever and by whoever committed, are unequivocally condemned. All States should abide by their international obligations in addressing the threat of terrorism, which continues to adversely affect peace, security, stability and development of many NAM countries. All victims of terrorism, including the Iranian civilian researchers and scientists who have fallen victim to inhumane terrorist campaign, deserve the deepest sympathy.

10. Dialogue among religions, cultures and civilisations should be enhanced, through supporting efforts made at the international level, towards reducing confrontation, suppressing xenophobia and islamophobia, promoting respect for diversity based on justice, fraternity and equality should be promoted, and all attempts of unculturalism or the imposition of particular models of political, economic, social, legal or cultural systems should be opposed, and promote dialogue among civilisations, culture of peace and inter-faith dialogue, which will contribute towards peace, security, stability and development.

11. The Non-Aligned Movement should mobilise all its capabilities in order to implement the decisions of its leaders, as expressed in its documents. Accordingly, NAM should consider the possibility of creating necessary mechanism with a view to following up on its decisions. ♦

# Burying the most important news on Iran's nuclear programme?

Western media reports on Iran have invariably betrayed an ominous slant. Nowhere has this been more evident than, as the following reports illustrate, in the news concerning its nuclear programme and its attitude to nuclear disarmament.

**Peter Hart**

THE release of a new International Atomic Energy Agency report on Iran was greeted as an ominous development by some major media outlets. But are they playing down what could be the most important news in the report?

The IAEA's latest made it to the *New York Times* (30 August) under the headline 'Inspectors Confirm New Work by Iran at Secure Nuclear Site'. Reporters David Sanger and William Broad write:

'Iran has installed three-quarters of the nuclear centrifuges it needs to complete a site deep underground for the production of nuclear fuel, international inspectors reported Thursday, a finding that led the White House to warn that "the window that is open now to resolve this diplomatically will not remain open indefinitely."'

The findings indeed sound dramatic: Twice as many centrifuges as before, and what some think is a suspicious clean-up job at the Parchin site, where some say Iran is conducting weapons research (an argument that is highly debatable).

The next day the *Times* was ramping up the talk of war, devoting a front-page piece to the debate inside Israel about how and when they might attack, presumably based on the same IAEA report. 'Report on Iran Nuclear Work Puts Israel in a Box,' reads the headline, and it stresses the Israeli government's interpretation in the lead:

'For Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the International Atomic Energy Agency on Thursday offered findings validating his longstanding position that while harsh economic



**Staff members heading towards a nuclear research reactor at the Tehran headquarters of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation. Media too often assume that Iran is building a nuclear weapon, despite zero evidence to substantiate that claim.**

sanctions and diplomatic isolation may have hurt Iran, they have failed to slow Tehran's nuclear programme. If anything, the programme is speeding up.'

The piece goes on to claim that 'the agency's report has also put Israel in a corner, documenting that Iran is close to crossing what Israel has long said is its red line: the capability to produce nuclear weapons in a location invulnerable to Israeli attack'.

The piece leans on anonymous sources in Israel and the United States, and frames the whole matter as a question of when Israel will decide to act: 'The report comes at a critical moment in Israel's long campaign to build Western support for stopping Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.'

Of course, there is the obvious

possibility that Iran is developing no such thing, but media too often assume that Iran is building a weapon – despite the fact that there is zero evidence to substantiate that claim.

But what should be the most important news in the IAEA report is being buried. Deep in the 30 August *Times* piece, readers learn this: 'Some of the 20% fuel is in a form that is extremely difficult to use in a bomb, and most of the stockpile is composed of a fuel enriched at a lower level that would take considerably longer to process for weapons use.'

Those findings are quite a bit at odds with the ominous talk of Iran crossing some sort of red line, and the need to strike sooner rather than later.

In the *Washington Post*, Joby Warrick had a piece that stressed the bad news first: 'Iran dramatically in-





A nuclear plant in Natanz, Iran. The dispute over Iran's nuclear programme has led to harsh sanctions that affect everyday life in the country.

creased its production of a more enriched form of uranium in recent months,' his 30 August article begins. But then he mentioned:

'The report said Iran has 255 pounds of uranium enriched at 20%, up from 159 pounds in May.

'But the IAEA also found that Iran had converted much of the new material to metal form for use in a nuclear research reactor. Once the conversion has taken place, the uranium can't be further enriched to weapons-grade material, Obama administration officials said.'

The dispute over Iran's nuclear programme has led to harsh sanctions that affect everyday life in the country. There is a very real chance that

the United States and/or Israel will attack Iran. If the new report presents evidence that a significant part of Iran's uranium stockpile cannot be used for weapons-making, it's hard to fathom why news accounts wouldn't lead their stories with this fact. Instead, we get stories that give Israeli officials one more chance to warn that war is inevitable to stop a nuclear weapons programme – one that very well might not exist. ♦

*Peter Hart is the activism director at US media watch group FAIR, from whose website (www.fair.org) this article is reproduced. He writes for FAIR's magazine Extra!, and is also a co-host and producer of FAIR's syndicated radio show CounterSpin. He is the author of The Oh Really? Factor: Unspinning Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly (Seven Stories Press, 2003).*

## Iran call for nuclear abolition by 2025 is unreported by *New York Times*

**Alice Slater**

THE Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), formed in 1961 during the Cold War, is a group of 120 states and 17 observer states not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. NAM held its 2012 summit under the new chairmanship of Iran, which succeeded Egypt as the chair.

Significantly, an Associated Press story in the *Washington Post*, headlined 'Iran opens nonaligned summit with calls for nuclear arms ban', reported that 'Iranian Foreign Minister

Ali Akbar Salehi opened the gathering by noting commitment to a previous goal from the nonaligned group, known as NAM, to remove the world's nuclear arsenals within 13 years. "We believe that the timetable for ultimate removal of nuclear weapons by 2025, which was proposed by NAM, will only be realised if we follow it up decisively," he told delegates.'

Yet the *New York Times*, which has been beating the drums for war with Iran, just as it played a disgraceful role in the deceptive reporting during the lead-up to the Iraq War, never

mentioned Iran's proposal for nuclear abolition. The *Times* carried the bland headline on its front page, 'At Summit Meeting, Iran Has a Message for the World', and then went on to state, 'the message is clear. As Iran plays host to the biggest international conference ...it wants to tell its side of the long standoff with the Western powers which are increasingly convinced that Tehran is pursuing nuclear weapons' – without ever reporting Iran's offer to support the NAM proposal for the abolition of nuclear weapons by 2025.

Surely the most sensible way to deal with Iran's nascent nuclear weapons capacity is to call all the nations to the table to negotiate a treaty to ban the bomb. That would mean abolishing the 20,000 nuclear bombs on the planet – in the US, UK, Russia, China, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel – with 19,000 of them in the US and Russia. In order to get Russia and China to the table, the US will also have to give up its dreams of dominating the earth with missile 'defences' which, driven by corrupt military contractors and a corporate-owned Congress, are currently being planted and based in provocative rings around Russia and China.

The ball is in the US court to make good-faith efforts for nuclear abolition. That would be the only principled way to deal with fears of nuclear proliferation. The US must start with a genuine offer for negotiations to finally ban the bomb in all countries, including a freeze on further missile development. It should stop beating up on Iran and North Korea while it hypocritically continues to improve and expand the US arsenal, with tens of billions of dollars for new weapons laboratories and bomb delivery systems, and fails to speak out against the nuclear activities of other nations such as the enrichment of uranium in Japan and Brazil and the nuclear arsenal of Israel. ♦

*Alice Slater is New York director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and serves on the Coordinating Committee of Abolition 2000, a global nuclear disarmament network. This article is reproduced from CommonDreams.org.*

# Monopolising war?

## What America knows how to do best

Washington may be permanently at war all over the world but astonishingly enough, the American people are almost wholly detached from all that is being done in their name, says *Tom Engelhardt*.

IT'S pop-quiz time when it comes to the American way of war: three questions, torn from the latest news, just for you. Here's the first of them, and good luck!

*In August, 200 US Marines began armed operations in...?*

- a) Afghanistan
- b) Pakistan
- c) Iran
- d) Somalia
- e) Yemen
- f) Central Africa
- g) Northern Mali
- h) The Philippines
- i) Guatemala

If you opted for any answer from 'a' through 'h', you took a reasonable shot at it. After all, there's an ongoing American war in Afghanistan and somewhere in the southern part of that country, 200 armed US Marines could well have been involved in an operation. In Pakistan, an undeclared, CIA-run air war has long been underway, and in the past there have been armed border crossings by US special operations forces as well as US piloted cross-border air strikes, but no Marines.

When it comes to Iran, Washington's regional preparations for war are staggering. The continual build-up of US naval power in the Persian Gulf, of land forces on bases around that country, of air power (and anti-missile defences) in the region should leave any observer breathless. There are US special operations forces near the Iranian border and CIA drones regularly over that country. In conjunction with the Israelis, Washington has launched a cyberwar against Iran's nuclear programme and computer systems. It has also established fierce oil and banking sanctions, and there seem to have been at least some US cross-border operations into Iran



**US Marines taking part in a military exercise in Guatemala in 2011. A 200-strong team of Marines were sent into action in Guatemala in August 2012 'in an unprecedented operation to beat drug traffickers in the Central America region'.**

going back to at least 2007. In addition, a recent front-page *New York Times* story on Obama administration attempts to mollify Israel over its Iran policy included this ominous line: 'The administration is also considering... covert activities that have been previously considered and rejected.' So 200 armed Marines in action in Iran – not yet, but don't get down on yourself, it was a good guess.

In Somalia, according to *Wired* magazine's Danger Room blog, there have been far more US drone flights and strikes against the Islamic extremist al-Shabaab movement and al-Qaeda elements than anyone previously knew. In addition, the US has at least partially funded, supported, equipped, advised, and promoted proxy wars there, involving Ethiopian troops back in 2007 and more recently Ugandan and Burundi troops (as well as an invading Kenyan army). In addition, CIA operatives and possibly other irregulars and hired guns are well established in Mogadishu, the capital.

In Yemen, as in Somalia, the com-

bination has been proxy war and strikes by drones (as well as piloted planes), with some US special forces advisors on the ground, and civilian casualties (and anger at the US) rising in the southern part of the country – but also, as in Somalia, no Marines.

Central Africa? Now, there's a thought. After all, at least 100 Green Berets were sent in there this year as part of a campaign against Joseph Kony's Uganda-based Lord's Resistance Army. As for Northern Mali, taken over by Islamic extremists (including an al-Qaeda-affiliated group), it certainly presents a target for future US intervention – and we still don't know what those three US Army commandos who skidded off a bridge to their deaths in their Toyota Land Rover with three 'Moroccan prostitutes' were doing in a country with which the US military had officially cut its ties after a democratically elected government was overthrown. But 200 Marines operating in war-torn areas of Africa? Not yet. When it comes to the Philippines, again no



Marines, even though US special forces and drones have been aiding the government in a low-level conflict with Islamic militants in Mindanao.

As it happens, the correct, if surprising, answer is 'i.' And if you chose it, congratulations!

On 29 August, the Associated Press reported that a 'team of 200 US Marines began patrolling Guatemala's western coast this week in an unprecedented operation to beat drug traffickers in the Central America region, a US military spokesman said Wednesday.' This could have been big news. It's a sizeable enough intervention: 200 Marines sent into action in a country where we last had a military presence in 1978. If this wasn't the beginning of something bigger and wider, it would be surprising, given that commando-style operatives from the US Drug Enforcement Administration have been firing weapons and killing locals in a similar effort in Honduras, and that, along with US drones, the CIA is evidently moving ever deeper into the drug war in Mexico.

In addition, there's a history here. After all, in the early part of the previous century, sending in the Marines – in Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere – was the way Washington demonstrated its power in its own 'backyard'. And yet, other than a few straightforward news reports on the Guatemalan intervention, there has been no significant media discussion, no storm of criticism or commentary, no mention at either political convention, and no debate or discussion about the wisdom of such a step in this country. Odds are that you didn't even notice that it had happened.

Think of it another way: in the post-2001 era, along with two disastrous wars on the Eurasian mainland, we've been regularly sending in the Marines or special operations forces, as well as naval, air, and robotic power. Such acts are, by now, so ordinary that they are seldom considered worthy of much discussion here, even though no other country acts (or even has the capacity to act) this way. This is simply what Washington's



**A US naval base in Bahrain. The US has an estimated 1,000-1,200 military bases scattered across the planet.**

National Security Complex does for a living.

At the moment, it seems, a historical circle is being closed with the Marines once again heading back into Latin America as the 'drug war' Washington proclaimed years ago becomes an actual drug war. It's a demonstration that, these days, when Washington sees a problem anywhere on the planet, its version of a 'foreign policy' is most likely to call on the US military. Force is increasingly not our option of last resort, but our first choice.

Now, consider question two in our little snap quiz of recent war news:

*In 2011, what percentage of the global arms market did the US control?*

(Keep in mind that, as everyone knows, the world is an arms bazaar filled with haggling merchants. Though the Cold War and the superpower arms rivalry is long over, there are obviously plenty of countries eager to peddle their weaponry, no matter what conflicts may be stoked as a result.)

a) 37% (\$12.1 billion), followed closely by Russia (\$10.7 billion), France, China, and the United Kingdom.

b) 52.7% (\$21.3 billion), followed by Russia at 19.3% (\$12.8 billion), France, Britain, China, Germany, and Italy.

c) 68% (\$37.8 billion), followed by Italy at 9% (\$3.7 billion) and Rus-

sia at 8% (\$3.5 billion).

d) 78% (\$66.3 billion), followed by Russia at 5.6% (\$4.8 billion).

Naturally, you eliminated 'd' first. Who wouldn't? After all, cornering close to 80% of the arms market would mean that the global weapons bazaar had essentially been converted into a monopoly operation. Of course, it's common knowledge that the US arms giants, given a massive helping hand in their marketing by the Pentagon, remain the collective 800-pound gorilla in any room. But 37% of that market is nothing to sniff at. (At least, it wasn't in 1990, the final days of the Cold War when the Russians were still a major competitor worldwide.) As for 52.7%, what national industry wouldn't bask in the glory of such a figure – a majority share of arms sold worldwide? (And, in fact, that was an impressive percentage back in the dismal sales year of 2010, when arms budgets worldwide were still feeling the pain of the lingering global economic recession.) Okay, so what about that hefty 68%? It couldn't have been a more striking achievement for US arms makers back in 2008 in what was otherwise distinctly a lagging market.

The correct answer for 2011, however, is the singularly unbelievable one: the US actually tripled its arms sales last year, hitting a record high, and cornering almost 78% of the global arms trade. This was reported in late August but, like those 200 Ma-



rines in Guatemala, never made it onto front pages or into the top TV news stories. And yet, if arms were drugs (and it's possible that, in some sense, they are, and that we humans can indeed get addicted to them), then the US has become something close enough to the world's sole dealer. That should be front-page news, shouldn't it?

Okay, so here's the third question in today's quiz:

*From a local base in which country did US Global Hawk drones fly long-range surveillance missions between late 2001 and at least 2006?*

- a) *The Seychelles Islands*
- b) *Ethiopia*
- c) *An unnamed Middle Eastern country*
- d) *Australia*

Actually, the drone base the US has indeed operated in the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean was first used only in 2009 and the drone base Washington has developed in Ethiopia by upgrading a civilian airport only became operational in 2011. As for that 'unnamed Middle Eastern country', perhaps Saudi Arabia, the new airstrip being built there, assumedly for the CIA's drones, may now be operational. Once again, the right answer turns out to be the unlikely one. Recently, the Australian media reported that the US had flown early, secretive Global Hawk missions out of a Royal Australian Air Force base at Edinburgh in South Australia. These were detected by a 'group of Adelaide aviation historians'. The Global Hawk, an enormous drone, can stay in the air a long time. What those flights were surveilling back then is unknown, though North Korea might be one guess. Whether they continued beyond 2006 is also unknown.

Unlike the previous two stories, this one never made it into the US media and if it had, would have gone unnoticed anyway. After all, who in Washington or among US reporters and pundits would have found it odd that, long before its recent, much-ballyhooed 'pivot' to Asia, the US was flying some of its earliest drone missions over vast areas of the Pacific? Who even finds it strange that, in the

years since 2001, the US has been putting together an ever more elaborate network of its own drone bases on foreign soil, or that the US has an estimated 1,000-1,200 military bases scattered across the planet, some the size of small American towns (not to speak of scads of bases in the United States)?

Like those Marines in Guatemala, like the near-monopoly on the arms trade, this sort of thing is hardly considered significant news in the US, though in its size and scope it is surely historically unprecedented. Nor does it seem strange to us that no other country on the planet has more than a tiny number of bases outside its own territory: the Russians have a scattered few in the former SSRs of the Soviet Union and a single old naval base in Syria that has been in the news of late; the French still have some in Francophone Africa; the British have a few leftovers from their own imperial era, including the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, which has essentially been transformed into an American base; and the Chinese may be in the process of setting up a couple of modest bases as well. Add up every non-American base on foreign soil, however, and the total is probably less than 2% of the American empire of bases.

### Investing in war

It would, by the way, be a snap to construct a little quiz like this every couple of weeks from US military news that's reported but not attended to here, and each quiz would make the same essential point: from Washington's perspective, the world is primarily a landscape for arming for, garrisoning for, training for, planning for, and making war. War is what we invest our time, energy, and treasure in on a scale that is, in its own way, remarkable, even if it seldom registers in this country.

In a sense (leaving aside the obvious inability of the US military to actually win wars), it may, at this point, be what we do best. After all, whatever the results, it's an accomplishment to send 200 Marines to

Guatemala for a month of drug interdiction work, to get those Global Hawks secretly to Australia to monitor the Pacific, and to corner the market on things that go boom in the night.

Think of it this way: the United States is alone on the planet, not just in its ability, but in its willingness to use military force in drug wars, religious wars, political wars, conflicts of almost any sort, constantly and on a global scale. No other group of powers collectively even comes close. It also stands alone as a purveyor of major weapons systems and so as a generator of war. It is, in a sense, a massive machine for the promotion of war on a global scale.

We have, in other words, what increasingly looks like a monopoly on war. There have, of course, been warrior societies in the past that committed themselves to a mobilised life of war-making above all else. What's unique about the United States is that it isn't a warrior society. Quite the opposite.

Washington may be mobilised for permanent war. Special operations forces may be operating in up to 120 countries. Drone bases may be proliferating across the planet. We may be building up forces in the Persian Gulf and 'pivoting' to Asia. Warrior corporations and rent-a-gun mercenary outfits have mobilised on the country's disparate battlefronts to profit from the increasingly privatised 21st-century American version of war. The American people, however, are demobilised and detached from the wars, interventions, operations, and other military activities done in their name. As a result, 200 Marines in Guatemala, almost 78% of global weapons sales, drones flying surveillance from Australia – no one here notices; no one here cares.

War: it's what we do the most and attend to the least. It's a nasty combination. ♦

*Tom Engelhardt, co-founder of the American Empire Project and author of The United States of Fear as well as The End of Victory Culture, runs the Nation Institute's TomDispatch.com, from which this article is reproduced. His latest book, co-authored with Nick Turse, is Terminator Planet: The First History of Drone Warfare, 2001-2050.*

# Renegotiating nationalisation in Bolivia's Colquiri mine

For months, Bolivia's second largest tin mine has been rocked by violent conflicts between rival mineworker factions. While the recent resolution of this dispute is a major step forward for the government of Evo Morales, the real challenge in ensuring durable peace is to articulate a mining code to reconcile competing interests.

**Emily Achtenberg**

RIVAL mineworker factions have signed an agreement with the Bolivian government to end a violent dispute at the Colquiri tin mine, Bolivia's second largest, which has rocked the country for months. The conflict offers a window into the complexity of Bolivia's mining sector, and the challenges faced by the government as it seeks to balance the contradictory expectations of different constituencies in reasserting popular control over Bolivia's mineral wealth.

'What's happening now is an example of the contradictions and difficulties that we face after nationalisation,' says mining minister Mario Virreira.

The conflict at Colquiri centres around competing demands for control of the site's most lucrative minefields by salaried, unionised mineworkers and independent, cooperative miners, each having longstanding historical claims to the site. Under a prior agreement reached with both groups last June, President Evo Morales revoked the mining licence of Swiss commodities giant Glencore at Colquiri and turned its operations (and workforce) over to COMIBOL, the state mining company. At the same time, COMIBOL granted a 30-year lease to cooperative miners at the site's Rosario vein, worth an estimated \$5 billion – honouring a prior concession made by Glencore in an effort to ally with the cooperative against nationalisation.

A subsequent dispute over the boundaries of the cooperative's concession led to renewed clashes and work stoppages at the mine, with pro-



The Colquiri mine's cooperative miners throwing stones during September clashes with salaried mine workers. The Colquiri conflict has brought competing visions for Bolivia's mining sector into renewed focus.

duction losses exceeding \$5 million. The head of COMIBOL resigned. In late September, road blockades mounted by the National Federation of Mining Cooperatives (FENCOMIN) in solidarity with Colquiri's cooperative miners disrupted commerce throughout the country.

The entire nation was shaken on 18 September when a march by cooperative miners in La Paz turned violent. A Colquiri mineworker, an ex-cooperative miner recently hired by the nationalised mining company, was killed in a dynamite explosion at the headquarters of the national mineworkers' union federation (FSTMB).

The episode evoked bitter memories of the 1980s, when revolutionary union leaders were assassinated at the same site by the dictatorship – only this time, it was miners killing miners. Despite occasional differences, both the FSTMB and FENCOMIN have been strong political allies of Morales.

While the new agreement resolves the immediate dispute by dividing the Rosario vein more equitably between the parties, the events at Colquiri reveal the broader conflicts and contradictions within Bolivia's mining sector and the historical forces that have shaped them.

The history of the Colquiri mine dates back to colonial times, through the era of tin baron Simon Patiño, and nationalisation after Bolivia's Revolution of 1952. In the 1980s, pressure from international financial institutions and a catastrophic fall in worldwide mineral prices led to a shutdown of the government mines, including Colquiri, displacing 25,000 unionised miners nationwide.

Privatisation of the mines in the 1990s under neoliberal structural adjustment policies further weakened COMIBOL and destroyed Bolivia's miner-led revolutionary trade union movement, once the most combative in Latin America (and perhaps the world). The Colquiri mine was sold

in 1999 to a company owned by ex-president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (Goni), the primary architect of structural adjustment who would be ousted by a coalition of popular movements four years later. Colquiri was purchased by Glencore in 2004, after Sánchez de Lozada fled the country.

The cooperative mining sector began to flourish at Colquiri (and elsewhere in Bolivia) when the government mines shut down, encouraged by successive neoliberal governments to buffer the consequences of massive mining dislocations. Associations organised with virtually no investment allowed ex-miners to eke out a modest existence by exploiting accessible veins and selling their products at depressed prices.

In recent years, with skyrocketing mineral prices, the cooperative mining sector has expanded rapidly, attracting new constituencies such as farmers seeking to supplement their dwindling agricultural earnings. When the Colquiri mine was nationalised last June, its workforce included an estimated 1,000-2,200 cooperative miners, as compared to 400 salaried miners on Glencore's (and then COMIBOL's) payroll. Nationally, the cooperative sector now includes at least 100,000 miners, up from 50,000 just five years ago. By comparison, an estimated 10,000 mineworkers remain in the private sector and around 7,000 are employed by COMIBOL.

With these numbers, the cooperative mining sector has emerged as a powerful and vocal political force under the Morales government. As Bolivia's Andean Information Network explains in an analysis of Bolivia's mining challenges, after two decades of a struggling existence, cooperative miners believe they are now entitled to benefit from soaring mineral prices. Along with the private mining sector, they resist nationalisation, fearing that state control and forced upgrading of the industry will rob them of increased earnings.

With their current veins rapidly becoming depleted, the cooperative sector has exerted growing pressure to expand their mining concessions, leading to conflicts such as Colquiri. An even more tragic dispute occurred in 2006 at Huanuni, where 16 died and

115 were injured as cooperative and salaried workers clashed over access to the richest mining veins (promised by the private mining company to the cooperatives, in a tactic later repeated at Colquiri). Morales has described this crisis as the saddest and most difficult of his presidency.

### Heated debate

The Colquiri conflict has brought competing visions for Bolivia's mining sector into renewed focus. While the 2009 Constitution recognises a plural mining economy (public, private and cooperative), a Supreme Decree promulgated by Morales on 1 May 2007 declares all of Bolivia's mineral wealth (except for previously granted concessions) to be a patrimony of the state.

In particular, Colquiri has reignited a heated debate about the role of the cooperative mining sector. Critics charge that few mining cooperatives today are collective entities with a social purpose. Rather, they have become another hierarchical form of private enterprise, controlled by a small and increasingly privileged group of associates (stockholders) who subcontract to an exploited, largely temporary workforce, paid only for what they produce.

According to some estimates, up to 75% of cooperative miners do not receive health insurance or pension benefits. The sector commonly ignores health and safety laws, and uses primitive extraction techniques that exploit the environment and shorten the life of the mine. Cooperative miners are also exempt from paying taxes to the state (increased under Morales to 37.5%).

Still, cooperative mining is a reality in Bolivia today. Defenders of the sector argue that it generates 85% of mining employment, absorbing cyclical dislocations, strengthening domestic demand, and bolstering the local economy. For many in neglected peripheral zones, it is the only available means of subsistence and social mobility.

Supporters of cooperative mining note that the sector works primarily in zones that COMIBOL lacks the capacity to exploit, constituting only

4% of the state's total mining area. Additionally, mining cooperatives do pay departmental royalties (1%-7%), as well as annual fees for their lease concessions.

Unlike the resolution of the Huanuni conflict, where the government nationalised 100% of the mine and successfully absorbed virtually the entire (4,000-member) cooperative workforce, the Colquiri settlement appears to grant significant concessions to the cooperative sector. In addition to bifurcating control of the site, COMIBOL has only committed to adding another 800 workers to its payroll, in addition to the 400 inherited from Glencore. Some 700 cooperative workers have already signed on with COMIBOL, taking advantage of the opportunity for stable employment and benefits. The workforce limitations guarantee that Colquiri's cooperative sector will continue.

Additionally, in exchange for FENCOMIN's agreement to lift its road blockades, the government has promised to 'partially lift' the Supreme Decree declaring Bolivia's mining wealth to be a public reserve. This is expected to pave the way for approval of some 467 cooperative mining contracts that are currently pending.

The Morales government has characterised the Colquiri settlement as 'historic'. But to prevent more violent clashes like Colquiri (and Huanuni) from occurring in the future, it will need to move beyond 'putting out fires' to articulate a clear policy, in the form of a mining code, that defines the respective roles and opportunities of each component of the mining sector.

This project, which has been stalled for some time by the inability to reconcile competing interests, represents a major political challenge for Morales – especially since losing the support of either the cooperative or the salaried mining sector could have serious consequences for his political future. ♦

*Emily Achtenberg is an urban planner and the author of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA)'s weekly blog Rebel Currents, covering Latin American social movements and progressive governments ([nacla.org/blog/rebel-currents](http://nacla.org/blog/rebel-currents)). This article is reproduced from Rebel Currents.*



# Involuntary sterilisation threatens rights of disabled women

Involuntary sterilisation of disabled women, often from marginalised groups and communities, is a worldwide problem.

IN 1996, Maria Mamerita Mestanza Chavez, a 33-year-old Peruvian mother of seven, was threatened with imprisonment if she did not comply with the government policy of undergoing sterilisation. After suffering post-operative complications for which she was refused treatment, Chavez died nine days later.

After years of legal proceedings in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), in 2003 the Peruvian government finally acknowledged international legal responsibility for its actions.

Chavez's story is not the only case in which national law has forced women to undergo involuntary sterilisation. Although many women's and disability rights organisations and other human rights bodies have condemned coercive sterilisation, thousands of women and girls worldwide are still denied the right to make decisions about their own reproduction.

Involuntary sterilisation, an operation which, without an individual's consent, permanently ends his or her ability to reproduce, has occurred in regions with many different cultural backgrounds, ranging from the United States and Switzerland to Japan, China, Puerto Rico, Brazil and others.

The operation 'has historically targeted...marginalised groups of women such as women with disabilities, women from ethnic minorities, indigenous women, low-income women and women living with HIV', said Luisa Cabal, vice president of the New York-based Centre for Reproductive Rights, at a side event organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) at the UN headquarters on 13 September.

WHO estimates that over a billion people in the world, or approxi-

## Gosia Stawecka

mately 15% of the global population, have disabilities. According to a WHO report, disabled women are particularly vulnerable to involuntary sterilisation.

Forced sterilisations on disabled women are often performed under the auspices of medical legal services or with the consent of court-appointed guardians, who have the authority to decide on behalf of the patient. Various justifications are offered for the procedure, including disabled women's inability to parent, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, population control, or so-called menstrual management.

## An international approach

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006 and ratified so far by 119 countries, recognises that disabled individuals have the right to make decisions freely and responsibly regarding their reproductive lives.

These rights and others were discussed at the Fifth Session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD, which concluded at the UN headquarters on 14 September. This year's conference focused on women and children.

Strongly advocating the rights of women with disabilities at the conference was Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Husseini, Jordan's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations.

In his remarks at the opening session, Hussein outlined the role Jordan's Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCD) has

played in raising awareness of and advocating for the rights of Jordanian women with disabilities who are subject to sterilisation, which he called a 'misconceived and shameful practice'.

'The committee targeted parents, doctors and gynaecologists, legal experts and judges as well as religious leaders to address this issue,' Hussein explained.

Despite the existence of the CRPD, disability is not even explicitly mentioned in the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), pointed out Ahmed Abul Kheir, Egypt's ambassador and adviser to the Minister of Social Affairs. He urged the UN to tackle the issue at a high-level meeting of the General Assembly on disability and development in September 2013.

## Government accountability

In 2011 five women with mental disabilities brought their case before the European Court of Human Rights. Each had involuntarily undergone the process of tubal ligation without their informed consent. This case, *Gauer and Others vs. France*, remains open but is considered the best example of how involuntary sterilisation can be effectively tackled by international institutions.

'A positive decision from the court in this important case would have a tremendous impact on reinforcing the autonomy of women with disabilities with respect to their reproductive health,' said Yannis Vardakastanis, president of the Brussels-based European Disability Forum, in a press release.

'States are under an obligation to take measures to prevent such violations and to investigate and prosecute

them to the fullest extent when they do occur,' he added.

Nevertheless, preventive measures and support services are often limited and insufficient, according to Cabal, the Centre for Reproductive Rights vice president.

'Governments and health institutions have weak or inadequately implemented informed consent policies, guidelines, procedures to protect patient rights,' she said. 'There is very little accountability for the ethical and human rights violations.'

'The human rights obligations of each state require the adoption of all necessary measures – legislative, budgetary, judicial and administrative – to ensure women with disabilities access to reproductive health services,' Cabal told IPS. States must also establish accountability mechanisms to ensure laws and policies are fully implemented.

Moreover, victims of forced sterilisation must have access to the court system to vindicate their rights, Cabal said.

### Information provision

According to Erszébet Földesi, the vice president of the European Disability Forum, one of the main challenges in preventing forced sterilisations is providing women with disabilities with appropriate information about their sexual and reproductive health care options. Another challenge is obtaining their free, full and informed consent to such procedures.

Health professionals ought to be 'trained to deal with and assist women with disabilities in the area of sexuality and reproductive health and motherhood', she added.

Asked what support must be delivered to the victims of forced sterilisation, Földesi told Inter Press Service (IPS) that victims must have access to 'recovery, rehabilitation and social integration'.

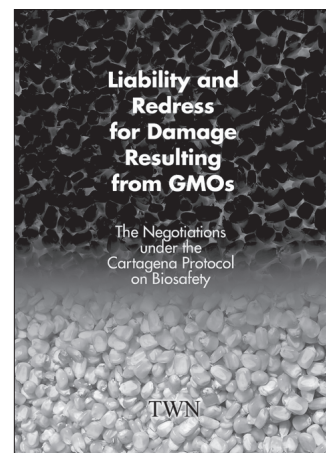
Highlighting the issue through social media networks or elsewhere online could help raise the awareness of the general public and policymakers about forced sterilisations, Földesi added. – IPS ♦

## Liability and Redress for Damage Resulting from GMOs

### The Negotiations under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

CONCERNS over the potential health, environmental and socio-economic risks posed by genetically engineered crops and food have been at the heart of longstanding calls for an international regime to assign responsibility for and deal with any damage caused by these genetically modified organisms (GMOs), specifically to provide compensation or take redress measures. The need for such a regime was finally realised in October 2010 with the adoption of the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

This landmark treaty was the culmination of long and difficult negotiations among Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. This book, a collection of contemporaneous reports from Third World Network publications, charts the challenging journey from the setting of the negotiating mandate in 2004 to the 2010 adoption of the liability and redress accord. While the agreement is seen to fall short of what its proponents had originally envisaged, it remains a beginning in the journey for



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liability and redress. Remaining gaps will need to be addressed at the national level, or through future work under the Supplementary Protocol.

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# Indigenous women seek the political kingdom

Bolivia has seen great progress in terms of women's participation in politics.

**Jenny Cartagena Torrico**

A GROWING number of Bolivia's indigenous women are participating in politics, ready to break the barriers of gender and ethnicity.

Though spread across great distances and representing various realities, many of these women share a similar history. Most started out leading civil society organisations and then went on to run for local public office, often overcoming resistance within their own families.

'The major obstacles [to accessing a government position] are domestic duties and economic issues,' Lucinda Villca, a councilwoman from Santiago de Andamarca, a municipality in the western district of Oruro, told Inter Press Service (IPS).

Villca is one of four councilwomen who shared their experiences with IPS during a national meeting of women leaders from rural local governments held recently in the central Bolivian city of Cochabamba.

'We go out on the fields early in the morning to help our husbands, tending the crops or taking the cattle out to pasture. We come home at night and we have to fix supper and make some time to weave so we can earn extra money for the house,' Villca explains.

'With these obligations, there's no time for anything else,' said this Aymara mother of nine who used to be one of the native leaders of her quinoa and llama farming *ayllu* (community).

'I now have a greater responsibility. As a member of the indigenous council my mission was to work for my community. In this new post I have to work for the future of my municipality,' she explained, describing an experience she shares with



**A Quechua leader at a meeting on rural women in Bolivia. The country's indigenous women politicians face many challenges.**

other indigenous leaders elected to local governments.

'I used to be a housewife. I'm a Guarani, and like many women in the countryside, I have no regular job. I was working for a women's organisation when I was asked to run for office,' Marina Cunaendi, a 55-year-old councilwoman from Urubicha, said.

Urubicha is one of Bolivia's poorest areas, despite being located in Santa Cruz, the country's most prosperous district. According to the last census, 85.5% of its 6,000 inhabitants – mostly Guarani people – live in extreme poverty.

Before being nominated in 2010, Cunaendi never thought of holding public office. She planted rice and corn and, in her 'free time', wove to support her seven children, along with her husband. In Urubicha, she said, women have no time to organise and are marginalised from political life. She admitted that she had to consult her husband and children, who were 'happy' to support her and encouraged her.

In San Julian, another municipal-

ity of Santa Cruz, Yolanda Cuellar, a Guarani, had to overcome a third barrier, that of being 'too young' in the eyes of her community to hold a municipal position. She turned 21 a month after being elected councilwoman in April 2010, on the ticket of Without Fear Movement, opposing the party of Movement to Socialism, which governs the municipality and the country.

'They didn't trust me because I was young, and a woman to boot. In our municipality, sexism is very strong. Now there are four of us women in the council,' this accountant and mother of two said.

Cuellar has her husband's support. 'He understands me and tells me not to quit because people voted for me; he tells me to fight for what I want and not give up just because somebody doesn't want me there,' she said.

But these women's lack of political experience and the constant discrimination by male peers have not made the work in the council easier. Being a councilwoman is also very different from being an indigenous

Franz Chavez/IPS



leader.

‘There’s a lot of bureaucracy which slows down any project, but the worst is the lack of support. Our ideas are ignored and we feel alone. It’s like nobody is interested in doing anything for young people and women,’ Cuellar said.

San Julian’s economy is also primarily agricultural, and, because one of the country’s leading highways runs through it, it is complemented with commerce and services activities. However, 57.9% of its more than 70,000 inhabitants live in extreme poverty.

Under the 2009 constitution and other applicable laws, women must occupy at least 50% of all elected government positions. To ensure that percentage, candidate lists must be drawn up by alternating between women and men.

At present, 43% of the mayors and councilpersons in Bolivia’s 327 local governments are women, and 96% of them are holding public office for the first time.

Lidia Alejandro, a 50-year-old Aymara councilwoman from Llallagua, a municipality in the mining district of Potosi, in western Bolivia, also identified inexperience as a factor that puts them at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts.

‘I became a councilwoman without knowing a thing about how municipal affairs are run. I’m a teacher, but holding office is very different. I couldn’t even speak up at a meeting or give statements to the press,’ Alejandro said. ‘I had to learn as I went along,’ she admitted. Training workshops also helped her overcome this limitation.

But training takes time, she said, and that causes problems with husbands as they reproach women leaders for neglecting their homes. Alejandro is troubled at the failure to attain the goal of bringing the women of her municipality out of poverty due



**Indigenous women from La Paz province. A growing number of Bolivia’s indigenous women are participating in politics.**



**A session of the constituent assembly which drafted Bolivia’s 2009 constitution. Under the constitution and other applicable laws, women must occupy at least 50% of all elected government positions.**

to a lack of specialists who can design projects to meet their needs.

Bolivian legislation requires that part of the annual budget at every government level be allocated to spending on projects that target the needs of women and other vulnerable groups. But most of these budget allocations are not spent and the funds are either returned or transferred to other areas.

‘Women have come to us to complain. “How is it that we have four councilwomen and they’re not doing anything for us?” they say. We’ve tried to join forces, but the truth is that we all have our political loyalties,’ Cuellar said.

Bolivia has seen great progress in terms of women’s participation in politics, furthered by the Constitution and a number of different laws, Natasha Loayza, a specialist with the UN Women’s office in Bolivia, told IPS. ‘The challenge is to translate this legislation into action, into real and concrete participation,’ she said.

The UN Women’s office’s ‘Semilla’ (seed) programme, a three-year pilot initiative now in its final year, helps women in rural districts exercise their economic and political rights. Loayza said that one of the programme’s goals was to motivate more women to

participate in politics by showing them the meaningful involvement of women who are already participating.

‘Women can now access [public office], but it’s very hard. It’s a colossal task. The women who have achieved positions of responsibility in public bodies can bear witness to the problems they face every day to make their presence felt, and not just occupy decision-making positions on paper,’ Loayza said.

The programme is being implemented by the ministry of equal opportunities in 18 rural districts and so far it has benefited 4,000 women, with \$9 million in financing from the United Nations. – IPS

# The elevation of the rich

In Britain, the rich and super-rich have once again taken on the mantle of those born to rule, says *Jeremy Seabrook*.



High-end homes in the wealthy London district of Knightsbridge. '[I]n recent years, the rich have been elevated into objects of emulation ... the source of all conceivable good.'

BRITAIN, the government never tires of repeating, 'is open for business'; as though the country was being refurbished, or was recovering from some natural catastrophe. Prime Minister David Cameron told his reshuffled cabinet in September that all ministers are now economic ministers, since the economy must now be the focus of all efforts.

The National Health Service, following the successful establishment of an outpost of Moorfields Eye Hospital in Dubai in 2007, is to be allowed to set up profit-making 'branches' abroad, to help fund the service at home. Education is now one of our major exports (although the withdrawal of London Metropolitan University's licence to sponsor international students has thrown thousands into uncertainty as to whether they will be able to finish their expensive courses; a piece of xenophobic self-sabotage which has certainly tarnished the trade in this particular commodity).

Culture is also a major source of revenue for Britain – archaic historical dramas about the upper classes like *Downton Abbey* have the agreeable effect of persuading the world that Britain really is still living its imperial heyday, at the same time yielding lucrative returns. We know that

the armaments industry has long made a significant contribution to keeping UK plc (as some proudly call it) afloat; authoritarian regimes have depended upon our weaponry to maintain order among their own restive citizens. Our language is also a profitable export item; the irony being that many native speakers in Britain have so little use for it that Shakespeare and the King James version of the Bible have become unintelligible to them.

## Dilemma

The urgency of restoring economic growth has placed the government in a dilemma. On the one hand, bankers, moneylenders and financiers who made great fortunes, both out of the financial collapse and out of its aftermath, are deeply unpopular. But these are also the people on whom, we are told, the country depends, to bring us out of the double-dip recession. How to rehabilitate the entrepreneurs and the masters of capital, how to ensure that London's financial sector does not suffer under the general opprobrium incurred by bankers, speculators and traders in esoteric products – this is the question facing the Coalition government.

The government has skilfully transferred responsibility for the crisis, not only onto the previous Labour administration, but also onto the people themselves, whose indebtedness, overspending and self-indulgence have been seen as contributory causes. The Coalition alone has the courage to 'rebalance' the economy, even if this means undermining the foundation of the welfare state. By playing on popular guilt (yes, we did overreach ourselves in the good times), general acquiescence has been gained

for its version of events; David Cameron's 'We are all in this together' is code for the culpability of the people.

In the process, the rich have to be defended, indeed, protected from public wrath; a task made easier by the fact that in recent years, the rich have been elevated into objects of emulation, role models, the movers and shakers of the world, the source of all conceivable good. This is why government ministers have been swift to defend their true constituents, those whose money counts more tellingly in the scales of power than the weightless thistledown of mere votes. The native rich are being joined by their friends from sites of economic chaos and uncertainty – Greece and Spain, Russia, the Middle East – to snap up multi-million properties in London, which must represent the most extensive money-laundering activity in the world.

Michael Fallon, the new minister of state for Business, said we should 'salute' the wealth creators; he likened entrepreneurs to 'Olympian champions', warning against the re-emergence of 'the politics of envy', that serviceable slogan used to delegitimise any whisper of social justice. Chancellor George Osborne is adamant that he will not overtax the 'wealth creators', lest they switch their mysterious arts to enriching occupants of countries whose leaders understand the sacred inviolability of the market. The myth of universal business is so potent that no human activity can now be undertaken unless it yields a 'return', pays dividends, is transformed into a market transaction. When Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg threatens to make the rich pay more, his empty words are carried away on the chill winds of economic 'reality'.

The restoration of the rich is still slightly precarious. Open contempt



for the people is still not quite permissible. The extraordinary allegation that the chief whip of the Conservatives in the House of Commons, Andrew Mitchell, called a policeman guarding Downing Street, one of the most exclusive gated communities in the world, a 'pleb', suggests a certain touchiness on the part of a cabinet crammed with millionaires. It is significant that Mitchell's use of the word 'fucking' – which would, until recently, have been considered appalling – was seen as less offensive than referring to the police as plebeians. Naturally, David Cameron, who lives in a world of public schoolboys who 'give assurances', 'solemn undertakings' and their word as a gentleman, chose to believe the Minister against the police version of the encounter. In extenuation, it was widely reported that, although Mitchell attended Rugby school (fees £10,033 per term), his grandmother had been in service in the East End; this, presumably, explained his mixture of patrician arrogance and low-life language.

The rich are no longer bloodsuckers, leeches or vampires, as they were sometimes represented in an earlier bestiary of capitalism; they are now a different order of creatures, tigers or lions, big beasts, cheetahs rather than cheaters. In spite of the sacrifice of a few conspicuous villains – Adam Appleyard for the failure of Northern Rock, Bob Diamond of Barclays for manipulating the London inter-bank loan rate – bankers are rarely sacked: they usually 'step down', elegantly, in their hand-crafted shoes, bonuses and dignity intact. Even those who depart voluntarily are said to 'fall on their sword', a process redolent of Roman soldiers rather than the shabby gamblers and chancers they have shown themselves to be.

The epic process that has transformed the wealthy from bloated plutocrats, grinders of the faces of the poor, extortioners and exploiters into creators of wealth and authors of affluence is complete. Public outrage must be channelled into placid waters, where it will not affect those who make the weather (as well as change the climate), and upon whose scientific sorcery growth and expansion depend.

Although a few 'bad eggs' in the world of finance have behaved reprehensibly, the rich as a group must not suffer, because it is by their grace that we enjoy the amenities we do. The rich are beyond reproach; and the great flaunters of fortunes have retained public respect and admiration – the luminaries of business, popular music, football, the stars of showbusiness and entrepreneurship, together with celebrities of all kinds, remain symbols of hope, an inspiration to a new generation.

### Role reversal

If the rich have been elevated once more, this is because they have moved into the spaces evacuated by labour. In fact, there has been a reversal of roles between rich and poor in the long years of boom and affluence. In a post-socialist world, it is the most adroit manipulators of money who have become the new heroes of labour. The workers have been demobilised from the high historical purpose they were to have fulfilled according to the visionaries of socialism. Their blood, sweat and tears are no longer evidence of exploitation, but are bodily fluids of shame, since they have, as it were, deserted their posts in the class war, and have ceded to their betters the task of saving the world.

The rich, always alert to new possibilities, have donned the discarded clothing of the sometime heroics of labour and promote themselves as the sole source of all hope, increase and improvement. They display not only their wealth but the indispensability of their works, the high-octane lifestyle, the urgent jetting between continents for the sake of saving this company, promoting that technology, taking over some neglected assets. They tirelessly span the globe, risking ulcers, heart conditions and an early grave in the interests of generating riches, less for themselves (despite the handsome rewards) than for the salvation of the people; for without their selfless dedication to the revolutions of money, we would languish in the poverty, ignorance and misery from which their unwearying hyperactivity has rescued us. They have become

redeemers – a role that belonged earlier to the vanguard of labour and, long before that, to the saints of Christianity. They have leapt into the space evacuated by the lost credibility of socialism, and show every sign of having taken up permanent residence there.

This is why economic crimes come low in the order of justice. Did HSBC launder money from Mexican drug cartels and potential terrorists, and did it apologise for a 'shameful system'? Was Ian Hannam of JP Morgan guilty of insider trading, a form of 'market abuse', as it was called, probably the worst form of abuse anyone can imagine? Did James Cayne of Bear Stearns cause the bank to suffer huge losses through sub-prime mortgages? Had Enron – perhaps the scandal of the century – hidden its debts in 'special-purpose entities'? Yes; but even the epic wrongdoing of the new century cannot diminish the newly exalted status of the global rich and the insolence of their dictatorial powers.

This is not new. Down the ages, the rich have been looked up to, revered, perceived as the elect of God, placed in their high station by Providence, appointed to oversee lesser mortals. What we are witnessing in our time is the extraordinary spectacle, not merely of a reversion to early industrialism, but something even more ancient – the re-creation of overlordship, and with it, the emergence of a new kind of peasantry, not toilers in field and farm, but dependants of highly specialised and impenetrable technologies: we are seeing the birth of a technopeasantry, pacified by the diversions, toys and playthings of a world in which their masters have taken on once more the mantle of those born to rule.

That there is a rough-and-ready congruence between the old bearers of aristocratic values and the new controllers of human destinies is not entirely fortuitous. But their remaking of the universe has been so successful that Marx's priority of changing the world must be set aside for a season, while the struggle to understand it must be started all over again. ♦

*Jeremy Seabrook is a freelance journalist based in the UK.*



The poetry of *Chong Chi-Yong* (1902-1951) is characterised by sharp images and a closeness to nature. His poems, critics have suggested, exude the air of the village, sea and mountains of the Korean peninsula.

## Spring Snow

The moment I open the door  
the far hills coldly strike my brow.

Right on the first day  
of the early spring month.

My forehead confronts, cool and bright,  
the still snow-covered peak.

The cracked ice and new wind following  
make my white coat-tie smell good.

It is now like a dream, rather sad,  
to have had such a shrinking time.

Parsley sprouts green,  
the once motionless fishes mumble.

For the unseasonable snow before flowering  
I long to be cold again without warm clothes.

Translated by Ko Won

## Measles

A December night quietly sits back  
From around the coal fire,  
A timeless beauty bursting forth.

There is no gleam on the glass,  
The curtains drawn,  
The door closed, key left in the lock.

A snow flurry whirls  
Like a swarm of humming bees.  
The measles, like red azaleas, are rife in a village.

Translated by SE Solberg