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Afghanistan: The Unstable Strategic Bridge

By Professor Amin Saikal*

Afghanistan is now in the grip of a problem of long-term, violent, structural disorder and insecurity. A number of senior NATO political and military figures have voiced strong scepticism about winning against the Taliban and their supporters, and have intimated that the US and its allies should focus more on generating the necessary conditions for security than democracy. Some have supported the Afghan President Hamid Karzai in his efforts to negotiate with the Taliban to produce a viable settlement. However, the Karzai government and its international backers are not as yet in a position to bargain for such a settlement. To reach this position, they would be required not only to impress upon the Taliban that they will not succeed militarily, but also to address the political and strategic vacuum that their own failures have created and the Taliban have exploited.

The strong presidential system, put in place under President Karzai, has not worked and is in urgent need of being restructured. It has proved to be unsuitable for a traditional, conflict-ridden Muslim country with a myriad of ethnic, tribal, linguistic and sectarian divisions. Such a system typically produces one winner and many disgruntled losers, capable of challenging and undermining the victor. It places too much burden of responsibility on one person, leaving the president highly vulnerable to unrealistic public expectations and to discontent,

especially when things go wrong. Yet, paradoxically, the actual powers of the president are often less than they appear on paper. To manage the affairs of the state, the president may find it tempting to engage in a politics of patronage and nepotism. This is what has transpired in Afghanistan.

Karzai has presided over an increasingly corrupt and dysfunctional government, which has had few systemic and functional relations with the public. He has not been able to create a united and competent governing elite, and personal friendship, family, tribal, ethnic and factional connections rather than merit have formed the basis for most senior government appointments. He has surrounded himself with a number of political and ethnic entrepreneurs, most of whom have come from the Afghan Diaspora and lack the necessary qualifications and experience to serve Afghanistan beyond their individual interests. Nor has Karzai consequently succeeded in fulfilling the expectations of a majority of the Afghan people in terms of peace, security and improved standards of living.

The counter-systemic elites, most importantly the Taliban and their allies, notably the Hezb-i Islami of the former maverick Mujahideen leader, Gulbuddin Hemyatyar, as well as foreign intelligence agencies, have penetrated the government and its instrumentalities of power at many levels. This has not only com-

promised governmental activities, but also held back the US and its allies from channelling most of their reconstruction aid through the government and coordinating closely with it on major policy and security operations. The result has been the generation of a massive political and security vacuum, enabling the Taliban and their supporters to act increasingly as more credible than the government.

The Afghan political system needs to be changed to a diversified, party-based parliamentary system of governance, headed by a prime

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DISARMING TIMES

A quarterly journal of Pax Christi Australia. It aims to provide members and interested peacemakers with peace news and views both local and international. We endeavour in each edition to reflect the three-fold emphasis of Pax Christi which engages members in study, Non-violent action and prayer for peace, justice, human rights, development and inter-faith and inter-civilisation dialogue.

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Pushing Obama's vision: A nuclear free world

John Dear SJ

NCR October 6, 2009 before President Obama was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.]

When President Obama presided over the United Nations Security Council recently to endorse a resolution to limit the spread of nuclear weapons, we saw a rare sight -- a sign of global leadership pointing humanity toward a new future of peace. But while his words inspired, and hope springs from his symbolic stand, nothing has changed.

Nuclear weapons still abound -- we have 25,000 on the planet and the nuclear industry is gathering its forces to keep the weapons in place. Obama called the next 12 months 'pivotal,' and he's right. Here again we have a small window of opportunity. So now is our time to push.

'The historic resolution we just adopted enshrines our shared commitment to a goal of a world without nuclear weapons,' Obama said. 'And it brings Security Council agreement on a broad framework for action to reduce nuclear dangers as we work toward that goal.'... If we fail to act,' he continued, 'we will invite arms races in every region, and the prospect of wars and acts of terror on a scale that we can hardly imagine.'

All he says rings true, but while he talks, Obama is quietly making deals to keep the nuclear business going. He kept nuclear weapons 'pit' production in his budget, and Congress has increased it, keeping the Los Alamos nuclear machine in business. More, he has promised not to press Israel to rid its land of nuclear weapons. The Orwellian 'doublespeak' continues -- as do the ruthless U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obama said that during the next 12 months, 'nations with nuclear weapons have the responsibility to move toward disarmament, and those without them have the responsibility to forsake them.' Many peace groups are organizing people to do just that.

'I think what happened at the U.N. with the U.S. taking responsibility and leadership was good,' activist Frida Berrigan told me. 'Obama's chairing of the Security Council was unprecedented and new. After the Bush administration, it's phenomenal progress. But the Security Council's resolution isn't a roadmap for disarmament. It doesn't get us to zero. It was about counter-proliferation, which isn't disarmament. So there's a lot of work to do. One out of five Americans thinks nuclear war is likely. The U.S. still spends six billion dollars a year on nuclear development. Russia has increased its nuclear spending this year.'

'So the months ahead are really important. We need to speak about this moment as an opportunity for disarmament and pursue Obama's vision of a nuclear free world. 'The taproot of violence in our society today is our intent to use nuclear weapons,' the late Jesuit Fr. Richard McSorley wrote famously. 'Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor by comparison. Until we squarely face the question of our consent to use nuclear weapons, any hope of large-scale improvement of public morality is doomed to failure.'

minister, who would come from the parliament with a parliamentary majority, under a figurehead president, elected by the parliament and provincial assemblies. Such a system can be more inclusive, providing for a range of influential actors to be locked in positions of national obligations and responsibilities. It can also provide for more accountability, transparency, efficiency and popular connection to the political system. To achieve this, the Afghan Constitution of 2004 requires substantial modification. This in turn demands the convening of a new Loya Jirga (traditional grand assembly), similar to the one that ratified the present Constitution, to legitimise the necessary constitutional changes.

The emphasis should not be on democracy, but rather on creating a workable government, with a culturally relevant national manifesto of state building that could help generate good governance as a prelude to democracy. Elections are too often equated with democracy. In a country like Afghanistan, which has lacked democratic traditions and has historically been subjected to traditionalist, authoritarian rule, elections have to be, for an extended period, simply one means to creating legitimate governments, with a gradual approach to fostering manageable political pluralism, civil society activities and national reconciliation. Only then could the country succeed in securing the necessary foundations for the growth of substantive democracy.

The reform of the political order should be accompanied by a sound approach to handling Afghanistan's geopolitical complexities. One factor that had historically helped Afghanistan, especially from the time of its formal independence in 1919 to the Soviet invasion of the country in late December 1979, was the country's pursuance of neutrality in world politics. The Afghan-US strategic partnership, signed in August 2005, together with the concurrent elevation of neighbouring Pakistan to the status of a major non-NATO ally of the US, has unnecessarily complicated Afghanistan's regional position. On the one hand, it has cushioned Pakistan against making major structural changes in its long-standing predatory behaviour towards Afghanistan. On the other, it has caused deep concern among other

regional actors. While the Islamic Republic of Iran has viewed the long-term US presence in Afghanistan as a serious threat and has remained highly sensitive to any return of Pakistan's influence in the country, as was the case during the Pakistan-backed rule of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001, Russia and India have shared Iran's trepidation. Moscow would like to see the end of US and NATO involvement in Afghanistan and in Central Asia, which it has historically regarded as vital to its security interests. By the same token, New Delhi has been keen to see a curtailment of Pakistan's regional ambitions and has therefore quietly shared Moscow's opposition to any situation in Afghanistan that could benefit Pakistan. Meanwhile, despite its cosy relations with Pakistan and historical differences with India, China has shared a common interest with Tehran, Moscow and New Delhi over Afghanistan.

A formal affirmation of Afghanistan's neutrality in world politics is needed to reassure Afghanistan's neighbours that the country will not become a long-term base from where the US and its allies, especially Pakistan, could advance their geo-strategic interests. This is not a call for the US to halt its assistance in support of Afghanistan's stabilisation and reconstruction, but rather for it to conduct them within the framework of UN Security resolutions. There is no need for an Afghan-US strategic partnership, which has potentially stimulated regional actors to remain predatory in their approach to Afghanistan in pursuit of their conflicting interests. This partnership has not gone down well with most of the Afghan people either. The Afghans have traditionally been accustomed to their country's policy of neutrality as symbolising their devotion to their sovereignty and independence.

Further, the Taliban insurgency is dominated by the tribally divided ethnic Pashtuns, who have historically formed about 42 percent of the Afghan population, and inhabited the provinces along the border with Pakistan, with extensive shared cross-border ethnic ties to that country. Karzai and a majority of his ministers also come from the same ethnic group. The current conflict is essentially an intra-Pashtun conflict, whilst a majority of the non-Pashtun population has remained largely aloof from the conflict. However, many among the non-Pashtun ethnic groups, such as Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen and Hazara, have grown as disillusioned as their Pashtun counter-parts with the Karzai government and international forces. As their areas in northern, central and western Afghanistan have been relatively peaceful, many of them feel that

they have not been rewarded for their cooperation. One way to assuage their concerns is to concentrate international reconstruction investment and efforts more in their areas until such time that the Taliban insurgency in the Pashtun-dominated provinces is contained and the way is open for reconstruction efforts to be implemented on a similar or higher scale in those provinces. Otherwise, there is now a serious risk that many non-Pashtuns could engage in insurgent activities. As such, they could, despite their opposition to the Taliban, who were exceptionally discriminatory and brutal towards them during their rule from 1997 to 2001, benefit the Taliban by default.

When a clean, efficient and effective government is in place and the US and its allies can closely coordinate with this government and among themselves, and the majority of citizens enjoy a more peaceful and secure life, the conditions would be right for two further developments. One is a realistic timetable to be drawn up for the withdrawal of foreign forces. Another is a viable settlement to be negotiated with the Taliban from a position of strength. As the situation stands, any approach to a negotiated settlement with the Taliban is undermined by the Taliban leadership's demand for the departure of foreign forces as a precondition for peace talks, and the lack of strength on the part of the government and its international supporters to prompt the Taliban to settle for a settlement that would be acceptable to a wide cross-section of Afghanistan's mosaic society. The best way to proceed would be to reach a settlement with the support of Afghanistan's neighbours, predicated on a US-Iranian rapprochement. However, if there is no substantial improvement in the above areas, no matter how much assistance the international community pours into Afghanistan, it is likely to be as wasteful as it has been so far.

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Afghanistan: Where Empires Go To Die

By Dahr Jamil*

This analysis by Jamil highlights the illegality and cruelty of the war in Afghanistan and how inevitably our active support for this war lessens us as a people and that we should urge a total rethink of our ongoing military involvement in the destruction of both people and country.

On September 7 the Swedish aid agency Swedish Committee for Afghanistan reported that the previous week US soldiers raided one of its hospitals. According to the director of the aid agency, Anders Fange, troops stormed through both the men's and women's wards, where they frantically searched for wounded Taliban fighters.

Soldiers demanded that hospital administrators inform the military of any incoming patients who might be insurgents, after which the military would then decide if said patients would be admitted or not. Fange called the incident "not only a clear violation of globally recognized humanitarian principles about the sanctity of health facilities and staff in areas of conflict, but also a clear breach of the civil-military agreement" between nongovernmental organizations and international forces.

Fange said that US troops broke down doors and tied up visitors and hospital staff.

Impeding operations at medical facilities in Afghanistan directly violates the Fourth Geneva Convention, which strictly forbids attacks on emergency vehicles and the obstruction of medical operations during wartime.

Lt. Cmdr. Christine Sidenstricker, a public affairs officer for the US Navy, confirmed the raid, and told The Associated Press, "Complaints like this are rare."

Despite Sidenstricker's claim that "complaints like this" are rare in Afghanistan, they are, in fact, common. Just as they are in Iraq, the other occupation. A desperate conventional military, when losing a guerilla war, tends to toss international law out the window. Yet even more so when the entire occupation itself is a violation of international law.

Marjorie Cohn, president of the National Lawyers Guild and also a Truthout contributor, is very clear about the overall illegality of the invasion and ongoing occupation of Afghanistan by the United States.

"The UN Charter is a treaty ratified by the United States and thus part of US law," Cohn, who is also a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law and recently co-authored the book "Rules of Disengagement: The Politics and Honor of Military Dissent" said, "Under the charter, a country can use armed force against another country only in self-defense or when the Security Council approves. Neither of those conditions was met before the United States invaded Afghanistan. The Taliban did not attack us on 9/11. Nineteen men - 15 from Saudi Arabia - did, and there was no imminent threat that Afghanistan would attack the US or another UN member country. The council did not authorize the United States or any other country to use military force against Afghanistan. The US war in Afghanistan is illegal."

Under the UN charter, a country can use armed force against another country only in self-defense or when the Security Council approves.

Thus, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, along with the ongoing slaughter of Afghan civilians and raiding hospitals, are in violation of international law as well as the US Constitution.

And of course the same applies for Iraq.

Let us recall November 8, 2004, when the US military launched its siege of Fallujah. The first thing done by the US military was to invade and occupy Fallujah General

Hospital. Then, too, like this recent incident in Afghanistan, doctors, patients and visitors alike had their hands tied and they were laid on the ground, oftentimes face down, and held at gunpoint.

During my first four trips to Iraq, I commonly encountered hospital staff who reported US military raids on their facilities. US soldiers regularly entered hospitals to search for wounded resistance fighters.

Doctors from Fallujah General Hospital, as well as others who worked in clinics throughout the city during both US sieges of Fallujah in 2004, reported that US Marines obstructed their services and that US snipers intentionally targeted their clinics and ambulances.

"The Marines have said they didn't close the hospital, but essentially they did," Dr. Abdulla, an orthopedic surgeon at Fallujah General Hospital who spoke on condition of using a different name, told Truthout in May 2004 of his experiences in the hospital. "They closed the bridge which connects us to the city [and] closed our road ... the area in front of our hospital was full of their soldiers and vehicles."

He added that this prevented countless patients who desperately needed medical care from receiving medical care. "Who knows how many of them died that we could have saved," said Dr. Abdulla. He also blamed the military for shooting at civilian ambulances, as well as shooting near the clinic at which he worked. "Some days we couldn't leave, or even go near the door because of the snipers," he said, "They were shooting at the front door of the clinic!"

Dr. Abdulla also said that US snipers shot and killed one of the ambulance drivers of the clinic where he worked during the fighting.

Dr. Ahmed, who also asked that only his first name be used because

he feared US military reprisals, said, "The Americans shot out the lights in the front of our hospital. They prevented doctors from reaching the emergency unit at the hospital, and we quickly began to run out of supplies and much-needed medications." He also stated that several times Marines kept the physicians in the residence building, thereby intentionally prohibiting them from entering the hospital to treat patients.

"All the time they came in, searched rooms and wandered around," said Dr. Ahmed, while explaining how US troops often entered the hospital in order to search for resistance fighters. Both he and Dr. Abdulla said the US troops never offered any medicine or supplies to assist the hospital when they carried out their incursions. Describing a situation that has occurred in other hospitals, he added, "Most of our patients left the hospital because they were afraid."

Dr. Abdulla said that one of their ambulance drivers was shot and killed by US snipers while he was attempting to collect the wounded near another clinic inside the city.

"The major problem we found were the American snipers," said Dr. Rashid, who worked at another clinic in the Jumaria Quarter of Falluja. "We saw them on top of the buildings near the mayor's office."

Dr. Rashid told of another incident in which a US sniper shot an ambulance driver in the leg. The ambulance driver survived, but a man who came to his rescue was shot by a US sniper and died on the operating table after Dr. Rashid and others had worked to save him. "He was a volunteer working on the ambulance to help collect the wounded," Dr. Rashid said sadly.

During Truthout's visit to the hospital in May 2004, two ambulances in the parking lot sat with bullet holes in their windshields, while others had bullet holes in their back doors and sides.

"I remember once we sent an ambulance to evacuate a family that was bombed by an aircraft," said Dr. Abdulla while continuing to speak about the US snipers, "The ambulance was sniped - one of the family died, and three were injured by the firing."

Neither Dr. Abdulla nor Dr. Rashid said they knew of any medical aid being provided to their hospital or

clinics by the US military. On this topic, Dr. Rashid said flatly, "They send only bombs, not medicine."

Chuwader General Hospital in Sadr City also reported similar findings to Truthout, as did other hospitals throughout Baghdad.

Dr. Abdul Ali, the ex-chief surgeon at Al-Noman Hospital, admitted that US soldiers had come to the hospital asking for information about resistance fighters. To this he said, "My policy is not to give my patients to the Americans. I deny information for the sake of the patient."

During an interview in April 2004, he admitted this intrusion occurred fairly regularly and interfered with patients receiving medical treatment. He noted, "Ten days ago this happened - this occurred after people began to come in from Fallujah, even though most of them were children, women and elderly."

A doctor at Al-Kerkh Hospital, speaking on condition of anonymity, shared a similar experience of the problem that appears to be rampant throughout much of the country: "We hear of Americans removing wounded Iraqis from hospitals. They are always coming here and asking us if we have injured fighters."

Speaking about the US military raid of the hospital in Afghanistan, UN spokesman Aleem Siddique said he was not aware of the details of the particular incident, but that international law requires the military to avoid operations in medical facilities.

"The rules are that medical facilities are not combat areas. It's unacceptable for a medical facility to become an area of active combat operations," he said. "The only exception to that under the Geneva Conventions is if a risk is being posed to people."

"There is the Hippocratic oath," Fange added, "If anyone is wounded, sick or in need of treatment ... if they are a human being, then they are received and treated as they should be by international law."

These are all indications of a US Empire in decline. Another recent sign of US desperation in Afghanistan was the bombing of two fuel tanker trucks that the Taliban had captured from NATO. US war-

planes bombed the vehicles, from which impoverished local villagers were taking free gas, incinerating as many as 150 civilians, according to reports from villagers. .

The United States Empire is following a long line of empires and conquerors that have met their end in Afghanistan. The Median and Persian Empires, Alexander the Great, the Seleucids, the Indo-Greeks, Turks, Mongols, British and Soviets all met the end of their ambitions in Afghanistan.

And today, the US Empire is on the fast track of its demise. A recent article by Tom Englehardt provides us with more key indicators of this.

- In 2002 there were 5,200 US soldiers in Afghanistan. By December of this year, there will be 68,000.
- Compared to the same period in 2008, Taliban attacks on coalition forces using Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) has risen 114 percent.
- Compared to the same period in 2008, coalition deaths from IED attacks have increased sixfold.
- Overall Taliban attacks on coalition forces in the first five months of 2009, compared to the same period last year, have increased 59 percent.

Genghis Khan could not hold onto Afghanistan.

Neither will the United States, particularly when in its desperation to continue its illegal occupation, it tosses aside international law, along with its own Constitution.

* Dahr Jamail, an independent journalist, is the author of "The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan," (Haymarket Books, 2009), and "Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches From an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq," (Haymarket Books, 2007). Jamail reported from occupied Iraq for nine months as well as from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Turkey over the last five years.

A Life On The Ocean Wave

By **Winston Halapua** Bishop for the Diocese of Polynesia in Aotearoa New Zealand,

The oceans embrace many lands. Few nations are entirely land-locked. The embrace of the ocean may be cruel and devastating, as in tsunami and rising sea levels, but the embrace of the ocean can bring life in many forms. To be embraced by the waves of the ocean presents a challenge — the challenge to move towards the unknown.

The Hebrew scriptures point to a God who will be with people on their journey — even their journey through the waves of the sea. The God we see in Jesus is God intimately engaged with our well-being, a God whose intention it is to bring us to our “desired harbour”, which must be one where there is safety, peace, and reason for thanksgiving.

On our journey as communities of faith, we will encounter many metaphorical storms, and indeed hurricanes, threatening our security and well-being. The challenges of our pluralistic world call for steadiness, the meeting of challenges head on with deep prayerful embrace and dialogue.

I will use the story of Polynesians and the development of Oceanic culture to point to ways forward. Acknowledging the wisdom of other peoples who have embarked on adventures of faith, I nevertheless offer a contribution from Oceania that has an emphasis on the vital importance of relationships.

Though it cannot be proved, it seems to me that a major motivation of the ancient Polynesians was a deep need to satisfy the spirit of adventure. Without a spirit of adventure, they would not have developed fishing craft into great ocean-going canoes. They would not have found the great courage to move onward beyond the horizon — to dare to

travel where humans had not travelled before.

The *tangata moana* (the Oceanic people) trace their origins to epic migrations across Oceania. When human migration by land was stopped short by the ocean boundaries, the ancestors of the Oceanic people did not allow the complexity and the mystery of the uncharted ocean to deter them. The challenge of the ocean was accepted.

There is a lack of written resources as to how the deep relational values of the Oceanic people emerged, developed, and were sustained. I would argue that the impact of life relationships from within the world of the vaka (the ocean-going canoe) formed the cradle of the emerging culture and world-view of the early Oceanic people. After thousands of years, the essence of the early formation of these ancient values remains in the culture of Oceanic people today.

Instilled and treasured in the heritage of the *tangata moana*, the Oceanic people, would have been a whole approach to life in constant relationship with fellow seafarers, including women and children, with the environment, the wind, the sky above and the waves beneath, and the presence of the gods and goddesses. All those on board would have needed to be in tune together, helping one another in order to arrive safely at their destination.

Central to the way of life was communication among those on board the vaka, with close participation and engagement. The longer the journey, the deeper would each member come to relate to the others and their bond with the ancestors. The longer the journey, the more deeply aware of the ocean and its life the seafarers would have become.

Empathy Missing for Most Vulnerable

National Indigenous Times, October 29, 2009

Both Labor and Liberal politicians in Australia use language like “illegal immigrants” or ‘queue jumpers’ that wedge asylum seekers as ‘outsiders’ in the Australian consciousness. According to Amy McGuire of *National Indigenous Times*, it is not far from the way Australia describes Aboriginal people as ‘dole bludgers’, ‘child abusers’ and ‘alcoholics’.

Like Aboriginal people, asylum seekers are often let down by Australians, who don't seem capable of empathising with their situation.

Partly at fault are the media who mislead Australians to such an extent that in a recent study conducted by Amnesty International, which surveyed the knowledge average Australians have on asylum seekers. ‘In 2008 only 3.4 percent of all the asylum seekers arriving in Australia came by boat, whilst 96.6 percent arrived by plane,’ Amnesty says. ‘Of the 1000 participants only one person answered correctly that around 4 percent arrive by boat. ‘The majority of participants guessed that 80 percent of asylum seekers arrive in Australia by boat, a figure that is widely off the mark and demonstrates the level of misinformation regarding asylum seekers that has been disseminated throughout the general public.’

Those ‘Asylum Seekers who do come by boat using ‘people smugglers’ are often the most desperate,’ Amnesty says.

The largest ethnic groups who attempt the perilous boat voyage to Australia are Sri Lankan and Afghani, both groups fleeing the violence and horrifically persecution. So where is our compassion? In Australia, it seems many still don't know who our most vulnerable actually are.

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Pax Christi International Peace Prize for 2009

The Executive Committee of Pax Christi International and the Cardinal Bernardus Alfrink Peace Fund have decided to present the 2009 award to **Justine Masika Bihamba**, from Goma in the North Kivu Province of the DR Congo.

For many years, Justine Masika has worked to improve the lives of rural women, defend human rights and assist victims of war, especially women who have been targeted by acts of sexual violence. Since 2003, she has been the coordinator of *Synergie des femmes pour les victimes des violences sexuelles* – SFVS – Women's Synergy for Victims of Sexual Violence. SFVS is a collective of 35 women's organisations in the DR Congo that defends the dignity of women and girls who have been raped or otherwise traumatised by war-related sexual violence.

The Award Ceremony took place in Rome on Monday 26 October 2009

More about Justine Masika Bihamba: See attached Peace Award.pdf

More about the Peace Award at

http://www.paxchristi.net/international/eng/about_cont.php?wat=awards

Australian government urged to act on nuclear weapons threat

ICAN has welcomed calls by a federal parliamentary inquiry for Australia to play a leading role in ridding the world of nuclear weapons through a global Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC). <http://www.icanw.org/node/4881>

Displaced People in Sri-Lanka

According to government figures, the fighting between the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) displaced over 409,000 people. At least 280,000 are displaced from areas previously under LTTE control. A dramatic influx of people fleeing the fighting and crossing to government controlled areas took place from March 2009. The displaced people, including 50,000 children, are being accommodated in 41 camps.

When United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited some of the camps in May, he said: "I have travelled around the world and visited similar places, but this is by far the most appalling scene I

have seen."

While some progress had been made on providing basic needs, much still needs to be done on the right to health, food, water, family reunion and access to relatives. AI has called on the government of Sri Lanka to end restrictions on liberty and freedom of movement; ensure that camps are of a truly civilian nature and administered by civilian authorities, rather than under military supervisions; and give immediate and full access to national and international organizations and observers, including aid agencies, in order to monitor the situation and provide a safeguard against human rights violations.

A quarter of a million Sri Lankans held in de facto detention camps are facing a humanitarian disaster as monsoon rains threaten to flood camps. (A.I.)

For action and more info: – contact: www.hrea.org.

Contact details for these embassy officials are:

Further action:

- Send e-mails and letters to your local Federal MP and Senators in your State or Territory asking them to impress upon the Government the need to continue pressure on the Sri Lankan Government to release the detained Tamils quickly (contact details will be found at <http://www.aph.gov.au/>)
- Send e-mails and letters to the Sri Lankan High Commissioner in Canberra expressing your concern about the continuing detention of Tamils
- Send e-mails and letters to the Ambassador of Japan and the Charge d'Affaires for the USA in Canberra urging their Governments, as major donor countries for Sri Lanka, to pressure the Sri Lankan Government to release the Tamil detainees.

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CHINA – BURMA – UNITED STATES RELATIONS

The geopolitics of our region is highlighted in this article by

Roland Watson

Note: This article was prepared for a seminar of the Asia Democracy Alliance in Washington, D.C., which Dictator Watch co-sponsored, in the Rayburn House of Representatives office building. It analyzes the relations of Burma with both China and the United States, including the impact of the Obama Administration's policy of engagement.

It provides for us a telling idea of the scope and heady reach of the superpowers in our region and how they affect the region over and above our influence in the region. It puts into perspective the 'White Paper' on defence recently released by the Australian Government and critiqued in the previous *Disarming Times*.

Pertinent History

There was a military coup in Burma in 1962, by General Ne Win. There is suspicion that the CIA was involved in the coup, and also the British, Israeli and French secret services. United States regional policy for East Asia at that time was dominated by the goal of containing the Chinese communists. Ne Win was viewed as a good ally in this effort.

Shortly after the coup, in 1963-64, the U.S. provided radar stations to Ne Win. Following widespread anti-Chinese riots in Burma in 1967, the U.S. sent surface to air missiles and artilleries, including 105 mm howitzers, 75 mm recoilless rifles, 106 mm recoilless rifles, etc. All of this was meant for defense, in case of an attack on Burma by China. Burma Army officers received training in the U.K. and the U.S. The U.K and Israel also reportedly trained BA intelligence personnel. Declassified State Dept. cables from the period show that the U.S. quickly developed a positive relationship with Ne Win. As early as 1965, he offered to host negotiations between the U.S. and Vietnam in Rangoon. He also provided regular advice to the U.S. about the region including in 1966 that it should not withdraw from Vietnam, and on the nature of China's

communist leaders. For the Chinese, he commented on their "extreme narrow-mindedness and parochialism."

Ne Win was invited to the U.S. by President Johnson, and visited the White House in 1966. He later bought houses in the U.K., Germany and Switzerland.

One U.S. appraisal of China at the time comes from a 1965 cable about the China Reporting Program, which was a secret effort to counter Chinese propaganda:

"The growth of Chinese Communist influence and capacity for subversion confronts us throughout the less developed areas of the world. With over three decades of pragmatic experience in psychological warfare and without the restraints imposed by generally accepted norms of international conduct, the Chinese communists have made impressive psychological gains in those areas. Their output is great in volume and professional in form."

In the 1960s, the United States actively opposed Chinese propaganda. It no longer does so. And, the Communist Party of China (CCP) has now

had an additional forty-five years to increase and strengthen its program, which is nothing less than the largest and most sophisticated propaganda and censorship machine in human history.

Another significant factor is that after their defeat by the communists in 1949, some 15,000 Chinese Nationalist troops (Kuomintang - KMT) took refuge in the Laos - Burma border areas. The U.S. supported evacuations of these troops to Taipei, but some 5,000 irregulars remained, and which Taipei continued to assist. This residual Nationalist force on China's southwest flank was an irritant to the CCP. The KMT also had a plan, although it was not implemented, to attack China in Yunnan and ally with the ethnic minorities there after the Korean War broke out. Many groups inside Burma were opposed to Ne Win, such as the students (the ABFSU - All Burma Federation of Student Unions). Another significant opponent was the Communist Party of Burma (BCP), which was initially formed in the late 1930s to fight the British (when Burma was still a colony of the U.K.). Following the

1962 coup, and superficial negotiations the following year between Ne Win and the BCP, significant conflict broke out between them. This civil war continued for decades, and with China providing substantial support to the BCP starting after the 1967 riots. The BCP became the most important regional ally of the CCP. The U.S. continued to support Ne Win through the Reagan years, under the cover of its anti-narcotics program. For example, two Bell helicopters for drug interdiction were shot down in 1984 by the Karen National Union (KNU), which was not involved in drugs. The Karen protested to the U.S., but got no reply.

U.S. allies also supplied arms to the regime. Germany built a factory to make G-2 and G-3 assault rifles, G-4 light machine guns, MG-42 general-purpose machine guns, MA-10 rocket launchers, and BA-103 rocket launchers. Switzerland sold PC-6 and PC-7 aircraft, and which were later used in a 1988 attack on the Karen headquarters at Manerplaw.

To summarize this history, one can say that prior to the popular uprising in Burma in 1988, the U.S. supported Ne Win's junta and China opposed it. This changed with the West ending its support following the 8/8/88 massacre.

China also dropped its support of the BCP at this time, leading to the Party's collapse. This change actually developed out of the secret deal reached during Nixon's 1972 visit to Beijing: that China would not support regional communist parties if the U.S. would refrain from again becoming involved in conflict in S.E. Asia. Thai and Malay communist parties also lost CCP support. (One wonders if this agreement is still active.)

Some of the ethnic armies in the northeast of Burma, notably the Wa (United Wa State Army - UWSA) and Kokang (Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army - MNDAA), were built on the remnants of the BCP, and have had good relations with China since that time. They were among the many ethnic armies, particularly in Shan State, that signed ceasefire agreements with Burma's junta in the late 1980s and early 1990s, reportedly following prodding from China. These ceasefires split the Burma ethnic armed resistance, and were successfully used by the regime, with CCP assistance, in their tactic of divide and conquer. The CCP has been pursuing a buffer policy with Burma through these ceasefire groups ever since.

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China's interests with Burma.

China has strategic and economic interests in Burma. The first strategic interest is that the CCP does not want Burma to become democratic. Such an event would inflame the democratic aspirations of the Chinese, and also give hope to the Tibetans, East Turkestanis and Southern Mongolians. The CCP will basically give the military regime of Burma whatever it wants, to ensure that this does not happen.

China also uses Burma in its strategic positioning with India, with which it has both military and economic competition. There are additionally three specific disputes: over the Aksai Chin

area of Kashmir, which China took in the Sino-Indian war in 1962; Arunachal Pradesh (which China refers to as Southern Tibet); and the fact that the Dalai Lama uses India as his base.

China has built an Indian Ocean deep-water port at Kyaukpyu on Burma's southwest coast, and it has an electronic intelligence operation directed at the Indian military on Great Coco Island.

China's economic interests in Burma are focused predominantly on the supply of energy and other natural resources. In November 2008, China signed a deal to build two pipelines across Burma. The first, from Yunnan (Kumming) to Kyaukpyu, is for oil and will open a new, shorter route for Middle East and African supplies. (It avoids the Malacca Strait.) The second, from Yunnan to Burma's gas fields, is for natural gas. Construction on the pipelines was supposed to have started in September, and is to be completed by 2013.

China is also the principal partner in two new dams on the Salween River in Eastern Burma, one in

Karen State and the other in Shan State. It is providing 50% of the funding for the Karen State dam (Hat Gyi), for which technical surveying has been completed.

China further is pursuing large mining ventures in Burma, including operating a nickel mine, being the sole customer for the output of a tungsten mine, etc. China is also the driving force behind the deforestation in Burma's northern forests, and the exploitation of Burmese jade and other gems.

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In summary, to satisfy its strategic and economic interests, China has changed its Burma policy since 1988 and become the regime's principal ally.

What the Military Junta Gets

The current military junta in Burma, the State Peace and Development Council, receives general diplomatic support from the CCP, in the form of regular statements that Burma's problems are internal and that the world shouldn't interfere. This is then backed up by a veto against all prospective United Nations Security Council action on the country.

The SPDC is already receiving large sums from the sale of its resources to China. When the new pipelines are brought on stream, this will jump to billions of dollars each year. China has also provided large-scale funding for infrastructure in Burma, notably roads and bridges and now dams and pipelines, together with a related supply of Chinese engineers.

China provides extensive military equipment and assistance, including trucks, jets, and ships; heavy weapons such as 130 mm artillery and 120 mm mortars; light arms, although these are often of substandard quality; and training. It is now public knowledge that Burma is pursuing a nuclear program, with North Korean and Russian assistance. (Dictator Watch prepared a comprehensive investigation of this program, with the first of many articles published in November 2006.) While China is not believed to be directly involved in the proliferation, it has encouraged the SPDC to acquire nuclear weapons, and the relationship of the regime with North Korea could not proceed without CCP approval. There have also been reports that North Korean nuclear technology is now being transported overland to Burma

through China (following shipment blockades – by the U.S. – by air and at sea).

Recent developments with China

The SPDC in August betrayed one of its ceasefire agreements and attacked the Chinese-ethnicity Kokang (MNDA). The Kokang have been driven from their territory, even though they have lived in the area since Burma's feudal days. Some 37,000 refugees fled to China. An unknown number have returned. Thousands of Kokang troops surrendered in China to the PLA.

There has further been a

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pattern in recent years of massive Chinese migration into northern Burma. (This has been disputed by China.)

There is now great concern that the Burma Army will attack the larger and stronger ceasefire groups in north and northeast Burma.

China is now building a series of refugee camps across from the Kachin and Wa areas. In summary, it appears that the SPDC has become hostile to China's ethnic allies. The plan of the junta leader, Than Shwe, is clearly to consolidate his rule over as much of Burma as possible, before his advancing age forces him to relinquish control. He no longer wants the ceasefire groups to have de-facto independence.

Perhaps more importantly, these groups are debating participating in the SPDC's upcoming 2010 general election, which is a pivotal part of Than Shwe's plan. This election will be based on Burma's 2008 Constitution, which was passed in a fraudulent referendum and which will

give the military a monopoly on power and that will be impossible to change.

Than Shwe needs popular legitimacy for the vote, to support his allies around the world when they argue that the election should not be rejected out of hand. These allies include U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Japan, Singapore, the E.U., and in the U.S academic David Steinberg, Senator Jim Webb, and, most worryingly, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Having the ceasefire groups participate in the election is much more important than their reorganizing as a border guard. Than Shwe's position is that they must agree to vote, or face the ultimate penalty.

Interestingly, the CCP appears ready to accept the SPDC's attacks against its allies (as signaled by its role disarming the Kokang, the building of the new refugee camps, etc). The reason for this is that if the junta can extend its control over all of Burma, this will make it even stronger and hence more difficult for Burma's pro-democracy movement to overcome. China's first strategic interest with Burma will be enhanced, which seemingly, at least to Beijing, is worth the betrayal of the Kokang, Wa and Kachin. (Note: there may well be disputes within the CCP, between Yunnan officials who are upset at these events and the Politburo back in Beijing.)

Of course, there are no guarantees that military action against the Wa and Kachin will be successful. For this reason, even with all the bluster, conflict on a widespread scale is unlikely. If the Burma Army does attack, and suffers high casualties, this would deepen fault-lines that are already known to exist. A coup against Than Shwe would become much more likely.

Recent developments with the U.S.

There has been serious fallout from the long-debated and now finally announced U.S. policy shift to engagement with the SPDC. Most importantly, Than Shwe has been emboldened. The engagement policy is all carrot and no stick, and there has been no punishment for his many misdeeds: the renewed imprisonment of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; attacks against the Kokang and also the Karen (and for the former with chemical weapons); a renewed pattern by the Burma Army of using rape as a weapon of war; and other such heinous acts. Engagement with the SPDC is therefore an odd policy: Than Shwe and his fellow generals are ruthless fascist/Nazi-like extremists, with whom negotiations have been and almost certainly will continue to be a complete waste of time.

The SPDC realized, when the review was announced at the beginning of the year, that American policy had actually already changed. For example, there was no longer a threat that the U.S. would assist Thai border-based resistance groups such as the KNU, Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and Shan State Army – South (SSA-South). (While the Bush Administration had not provided such help, this possibility couldn't be ruled out.) This precipitated the unusual rainy season offensive against the Karen, and it has also freed up troops for operations in Shan State. The policy weakening was further likely a factor in the harsh treatment of Daw Suu.

Of even more concern, though, is that there are now credible reports of a new assassination plot by the SPDC. There is word that Than Shwe has ordered the execution of the leaders of any ceasefire groups that refuse to become border militias or support the 2010 election; of leaders of non-ceasefire armed resistance groups; and of other pro-democracy leaders who op-

pose the election. While this might be psychological warfare, it cannot be dismissed as an empty threat. The junta assassinated Padoh Mahn Sha, the General Secretary of the KNU, in February 2008. Than Shwe now appears intent on systematically eliminating all opposition. It is conceivable that U.S. engagement motivated this, and that it will result in a wave of assassinations. Kurt Campbell, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, should have confronted the SPDC about this when he met its officials last week at the United Nations.

The U.S. must correct its flawed diplomatic signals. Further, the Administration must refrain from strong-arming Daw Suu and the National League for Democracy to relent over sanctions and to participate in the upcoming election. Indeed, the U.S. policy shift has so unsettled the Burma pro-democracy movement that the following questions can legitimately be asked. Should the monks and the students abandon their hopes of organizing a new popular uprising? Should the KNU and the other ethnic groups stop defending their people? Should everyone just wait to be saved by America?

The preferred U.S. policy for Burma is as follows: Oppose the 2010 election; organize an international arms embargo; instigate a crimes against humanity investigation; provide cross-border IDP aid; sanction Chevron; support the pro-democracy armed resistance; and, lastly, release the long-delayed JADE Act Section 10 report on Military and Intelligence Aid to Burma (which would confirm the nuclear threat

Summary

Before 1988, the United States supported Burma's military rulers, and China opposed them. These positions then re-

versed following 1988. But, it now appears that the U.S. is changing sides again, and joining China in supporting the SPDC.

This shift to engagement is also evident for U.S. policy towards China (where containment has been publicly renounced). Prior administrations would mention the terrible state of human rights in China, and send important signals of their support for democracy by meeting such individuals as the Dalai Lama. It unfortunately, if not amazingly, now appears to be the case that there is no room for the promotion of democracy in President Obama's foreign policy.

What this implies is that freedom for the people of Burma has become even more remote. They truly are on their own. Moreover, freedom for Burma will likely require freedom for China first. (This is analogous to how freedom for East Timor required freedom for Indonesia first.) It is extremely difficult, though, to envision how this might happen now that the U.S. has also dropped freedom and human rights from its China agenda.

The only positive possibility is that President Obama is simply drawing a clear line between himself and former President Bush; that he expects engagement will fail (including with Iran and North Korea); and that when it does he will announce, "we tried," and then move on to stronger measures and with multilateral support. However, while this might make sense (Obama's no fool – he understands that there is no real hope for engagement), and while it would constitute an ingenious chess move on the world stage, he shouldn't forget that the longer he delays strengthening American policy, the more people will die as tyrants take advantage of its present weakness.

www.dictatorwatch.org/articles/chinaburma.html

NOTICE BOARD

NEW SOUTH WALES Pax Christi Meetings

We normally meet on the First Monday of each month at 6.00pm for shared meal that members bring and the meeting follows at 6.30 pm..

Contact: Claude Mostowik
0295503845 or 0411450953

The venue: MSC Justice and Peace Centre, 15A Swanson Street, Erskineville. 2 minutes walk from Erskineville Station.

QUEENSLAND Pax Christi Meetings

Pax Christi Queensland Branch meets monthly.
Contact:

Pancras Jordan OP
0415 461 620
panjordan@yahoo.com

Clare Cooke SSps
mccooke@msn.com

VICTORIA Agapes and Public Forums

Our activities include Public Forums and Agapes. The Agape is a gathering of Pax Christi members and supporters that involves sharing a meal around the theme of peace with reflection and prayer.

November 15th 3:00 –7:30pm
Kildara Centre 39 Stanhope St. Malvern
Annual General Meeting
ALL INVITED

December 13th 4:30pm
Kildara Centre,
39 Stanhope Street Malvern
Guest: Dr. Visier Sanyu member of Magar - an ancient indigenous nationality of Nepal. Now an officer for the National Program on Refugees and Displaced Peoples

February 2010
Plans for the 2010 agapes/public forums will be addressed next meeting and all will be informed of the programme and dates.

Nuclear Action

Sign the Appeal for a Nuclear Weapons-Free World

Sign this Appeal from the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs calling for the negotiations of a nuclear weapons convention, to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons without delay. http://www.antiatom.org/sig/2010/E_index.html

Australia should stop relying on nuclear deterrence

ICAN spokesperson Dr. Sue Wareham also writes on Australia's subservience to nuclear deterrence - an out-dated and dangerous Cold War policy that lives on.

<http://www.icanw.org/node/4903>

UN Security Council passes nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament resolution 1887

ICAN welcomed the unanimous adoption of the historic UN Security Council resolution 1887, which affirms the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

"This is the most significant commitment in many years by key nuclear powers to work towards a nuclear-weapon-free world," said ICAN spokesperson Dr Bill Williams. "What we need now is a clearly defined road map to zero, which includes a time frame."

<http://www.icanw.org/node/4894>

I/We wish to apply for or renew membership of the International Christian Peace Movement -

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(Membership is from January to December)

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