

Tension grows over Iran's opaque nuclear intentions

James Best examines the global implications of Iran's nuclear weapons policy

On the 2nd of February, the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will convene to discuss the implementation of safeguards with respect to Iran's nuclear energy programme, as requested by the permanent missions of France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

On the 12th of January, British, German and French Foreign Ministers announced the end of negotiations over Iran's suspected nuclear weapons programme and that Iran would be brought before the UN Security Council. The decision was supported in an address by Condoleezza Rice, in which the US Secretary of State said that Iran's "rejection of diplomatic initiatives offered by the EU and Russia" and "its dangerous defiance of the entire international community" had brought international condemnation upon the government in Tehran and the necessity of UN action.

The present situation dates back to September 2002 when Iran informed the IAEA that it was building new facilities in a move towards developing the nuclear fuel cycle. This was followed by a visit from IAEA Director-General Mohammed ElBaradei who was "taken aback" by Iran's nuclear programme. Iran, in a joint statement with the UK, France and Germany, agreed to cooperate with the IAEA. This began the long series of negotiations, restrictions, political wrangling and evasions that culminated with the removal of IAEA seals at Narantz on 10th January 2006 and the resulting international protestations and appeals to adhere to the agreements made with the IAEA, Germany, France and the United Kingdom.

Iran's Deputy Secretary for International Security Javad Vaidi claims that Iran wants "reasonable, constructive and bilateral negotiations" but that this is jeopardised by Europe "threatening to refer [Iran] to the Security Council which [Europeans] think hangs over Iran like a sword of Damocles". He goes further to threaten the termination of all voluntary measures agreed

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with the IAEA and begin enriching uranium, the process needed for both nuclear energy and weapons, immediately should they be referred to the UN Security Council.

Iran is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and is thus under an obligation to make its nuclear programme transparent to external independent observers. In



The Bushehr nuclear power facility in Iran

September last year the IAEA concluded that Iran had not complied over issues of transparency and that therefore they could not conclude that Iran's nuclear programme was for solely peaceful purposes.

In an interview on the 12th of January, Mohammed ElBaradei points out that Iran has "a right under the treaty to enrich uranium" and is not in fact in breach of the treaty. However, he claims that, "if they [Iran] have the nuclear material and they have a parallel weaponization program along the way, they are really not very far - a few months - from a weapon". Furthermore he says that the IEAE have "information about some modification of their missiles that could have some relationship to the nuclear programme".

Critics of the moves to bring Iran before the Security Council have pointed out that sanctions were neither threatened nor imposed upon India or Pakistan, both of which have declared the possession of nuclear weapons. Also Israel does not confirm nor deny the existence of its nuclear weapons, despite allegations made to the *Sunday Times* by Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli nuclear technician. None of these countries are members of the NPT and Pakistan was involved in the

sale of black market nuclear technology to North Korea and Iran.

There are many possible outcomes of this situation. Initially sanctions are most likely and would probably start small, such as travel bans for government leaders and Iranian sports teams. This could escalate to economic sanctions, but this would be difficult as Iran has important energy contracts with Russia, China, Japan, India, South Korea and others. With a large amount of money in the bank from recently high oil prices Iran may be able to afford sanctions more easily than those countries involved in the decision to impose them. This was illustrated by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's comment that "You [the west] need us more than we need you".

If these were the only considerations then the situation would be less explosive but they are not, for President Ahmadinejad threatened to "wipe Israel off the map", predictably provoking an equally confrontational response, not just from Israel but also from President Bush and others within the US. Mr Bush announced that the US will not be "blackmailed" by an Iranian nuclear weapon and that the US is "committed to the safety of Israel". Israel's response has been to threaten mili-

tary action and the use of bunker busting bombs, supplied by the US, to attack Iranian nuclear facilities.

The Middle East has not been this unstable in a long time and the outcome of this conflict is anything but certain. The effects of a conflict, violent or peaceful, will be felt across the globe. The direction will be clearer after the 2nd of February but the end is a long way from sight.

Coca farmer sweeps Bolivian elections

Bolivia joins the leftward shift in Latin American politics. By **Ellen Carpenter**

Bolivia inaugurated its new president amidst hopes for an end to the turmoil it has suffered under previous leaders. Evo Morales, the indigenous leader of the Movement Towards Socialism party (MAS) was voted in with a decisive majority on the 8th of December 2005.

As Bolivia's first indigenous president and a former coca farmer and llama herder, Morales has great support from Bolivia's two-thirds indigenous population. Journalist Rene Barcena says, "as a Bolivian I am really proud to have voted for him".

Morales' election campaign was based around the reform of Bolivia's natural gas industry, an issue which has resulted in violent unrest in recent years. Bolivia's previous elected president, Carlos Mesa, was forced to resign after weeks of mass protests and blockades surrounded the de facto capital of La Paz.

Elections were called earlier than usual by the interim president, Eduardo Rodriguez, in order to prevent further disorder.

President Morales was inaugurated on the 22nd of January. The official ceremony was preceded by a religious ritual at the Tiahuanaco, a pre-Inca ruined city in the Andes, in which Morales made offerings to Pachamama, or Mother Earth, in tribute to the country's indigenous population.

Fellow left-wing leaders Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva were present at the official inauguration at the Palacio Quemado, La Paz's seat of government.

Evo Morales' policy is predicted to meet with opposition from Washington and international business. Morales has vowed to redress the inequalities of Bolivian society, and in particular to create a fairer hydrocarbons industry. While the landlocked country has the second largest natural gas reserves in South America, the vast majority of profit goes to foreign exporters. Morales plans to follow Hugo Chavez's approach of nationalised exploitation of natural resources to fund social spending.



"All of our action is a war cry against imperialism" - anti-American feeling at La Paz University, Bolivia

Several international companies have already attempted to sue the Bolivian state for breach of contract after Mesa's government raised export taxes on hydrocarbons in 2005. Morales has attempted to soothe investors with promises of maintained profits, but insists that he will take steps towards nationalising the industry.

Morales may also encounter opposition from the gas-rich departments of Santa Cruz and Tarija in the east of Bolivia, populated largely by non-indigenous European Bolivians. Morales' opponent in the presidential elections, Jorge Quiroga, drew his support largely from these areas.

Morales' policy on coca farming will also potentially bring Bolivia into conflict with the US government. The coca plant, the raw material for cocaine, is an integral part of Bolivian life. Consumed as tea or chewed raw, coca acts to suppress hunger, raise the body temperature and combat the adverse physical

effects of altitude, all vital in the impoverished altiplano lifestyle of many indigenous Bolivians.

While Morales has proclaimed his dedication to fighting the production of cocaine, his refusal to cooperate with America's coca eradication schemes has raised questions regarding continuing aid from the US government.

The new president has already demonstrated his socialist convictions by halving his own pay to little over £1000 a month, a cut of 57%.

Evo Morales' victory in the recent elections, in which he gained the largest majority of votes since the reintroduction of democracy in the 1980s, is evidence of the overall leftward shift in Latin American politics. As a close friend of Hugo Chavez, the leftist leader of Venezuela, and Fidel Castro, Morales has claimed to be part of a growing 'axis of good' in the region in opposition to Washington and its allies.

Chile has also joined the emerg-

The political career of one of the Middle East's most controversial figures reaches its conclusion

By **Michelle Norfolk**
DEPUTY POLITICS EDITOR

With ill health forcing the Israeli president from office, we ask what his legacy could mean for the region



Above: Ariel Sharon

Ariel Sharon, the 11th Prime Minister of Israel since February 2001, is a long-serving Israeli political and military leader. Tragedy struck at the 77 year old's political peak, when he suffered a major stroke on the 4th of January this year. He was a founding member and former head of the Likud party, and previously served for 30 years in the Israeli Defense forces, rising to the rank of Major General. Sharon changed the history of the Middle East, by withdrawing from Gaza and building a barrier in the West Bank, effectively killing the dream of a Greater Israel, incorporating captured Arab lands. However, this Middle Eastern figure has been shrouded in controversy

for the majority of his professional life. Referred to by many as "the Butcher of Beirut" from being found indirectly responsible for the massacres of 'Sabra and Shatila' of 1982 in the Lebanon war by the Kahan Commission, to the brutal reprisal raids he held against Palestinian infiltrators in the 1950's, it is no wonder why people compare him to a terrorist and war criminal.

However, within his own country, there has never been a leader accepted with such devotion. He is known as, "Arik, King of Israel", and former peace negotiator Amos Guiera, doubts Sharon's political successors will ever be embraced as warmly. At home, Sharon is a war hero, who strove to establish peace

without sacrificing Israel's security, as in the 6 Day War in 1967, and in 1973 in the Yom Kippur War. Both left and right Israelis - even those who reviled him as one of the chief architects of Israel's greatest folly; its programme of settlement building - had come to see him as the only politician capable of leading the country in any direction.

Having successfully pulled off the Gaza withdrawal and founded a new Centrist party, Kadima, that looked poised to win elections on 28th March, what is the future for Israel? Nobody knows who will carry on Sharon's unfinished mission of drawing Israel's final boarders, especially as his political heirs lack the strength and popularity to

uproot Jewish settlers from the West Bank. There is no denying that Israelis will find it hard to adjust to life without a larger than life leader, with no one quite sure what is coming next.

One thing is for sure, Mr Sharon's departure from politics will be bad for peace with the Palestinians. Until his stroke, a party of the centre, ready for a two-state solution but tough on security, was just what secular Israeli mainstream seemed to want. But with no clear or strong heir, Kadima isn't as powerful as was thought. Even if they were voted in, Israelis know the best they can expect is for them to carry on with the disengagement plan, the very plan that, although

praised everywhere else, has added to the lawlessness and impoverishment of Gaza. Olmert, Kadima's new leader and acting Prime Minister, lacks a natural following, Peres, a new Kadima supporter and past Prime Minister, is a serial loser of elections and widely distrusted, and Peretz, the Labour Party leader, stands little chance of winning with the political mood in Israel.

Thus, whether you consider Ariel Sharon to be a war hero or a bloody tyrant, you cannot deny he has been present at or involved in nearly every seminal moment in modern Israel's history, and with him gone from the political landscape, the agenda for the Middle East seems even more uncertain.

The Campus Soap Box

Nouse invites campus political groups to vent on an issue of their choice. This edition, the Lib Dems reflect on the campaign for party leadership

By **Adam Hewitt (member of the Liberal Democrats)**

The Liberal Democrats have had more press coverage in the past three weeks than they have had since the General Election, so the only sensible thing to do seems to be to add a tiny bit more.

Most recently, Mark Oaten resigned from his position as Home Affairs spokesman, admitting to a six-month affair with a rent boy. I think I stand with a lot of Liberal Democrats and liberals generally when I say that unless this affair compromised his ability to do his job, his private life (which can be as 'bizarre' as he wants it to be as long as it stays legal, despite what the tabloids say) is his own. He didn't lie to the public, and accusations of hypocrisy are ludicrous - we want to liberalise prostitution and, on top of this, are absolutely committed to gay rights and diversity. Oaten wouldn't have made a good leader for the party, so I'm glad he's stepped down from the leadership race, but that's a different matter - one concerned with his performance as an MP and a party spokesman, on which it is vital he is judged.

With the leadership campaigns, much of the national media are having their usual caricature festival, pulling and poking the issues so they fit through easy-to-report holes, even if that means ignoring the truth. In most reports, the three candidates are simply the "left-wing one", the "old one" and the "no-one". When reporting gets slightly more in-depth the usual talk is of huge ideological splits, sometimes even along a Liberal/SDP fault line as a hangover from the 1980s.

This is almost entirely nonsense.

All three are gut liberals and approach issues from a liberal perspective - even if a left-wing or right-wing perspective would be easier to stereotype. They are equally committed to supporting human rights and civil liberties and thus fighting the authoritarian Labour government over ID cards, 'extraordinary rendition' and detention without trial. They are all committed to constitutional reform, including a fairer voting system. All are committed to fighting climate change in a more effective manner than the current government or the Tories. All are committed to liberal policies on drugs and crime. Chris Huhne and Simon Hughes, say, are much closer to each other philosophically and policy-wise than to any other party.

I'm still undecided, and am choosing between the candidates based on how well I think they'll lead the party (remembering that it is the Party Conference that sets policy) and how they will come across to the public. All three are committed to the same brand of liberalism as I am and any great left/right splits between them exist in the media rather than reality, if you look into what they've each written and proposed. I can see any of the three making a good leader and fully hope that the two runners-up stay as important members of the Shadow Cabinet - which is bad for a rant, but good for the Liberal Democrats.

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