

## **Iran's nuclear ambitions and the new world order**

In late December 2003, Iran's Islamic regime, under pressure from the "international community", agreed to sign the additional protocols of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), allowing tougher inspections of its nuclear industry. The UN's nuclear watchdog was supposed to receive better access to data and greater powers, although snap inspections – such as those in pre-war Iraq – were ruled out. However by early March 2004, Iran faced criticism for failing to disclose parts of its nuclear programme in a resolution drafted at a meeting of the UN nuclear watchdog. According to the IAEA's report Tehran failed to reveal sensitive research in a declaration submitted last October. The report singled out Iran's failure to declare that it was researching advanced centrifuge designs, known as P2, capable of producing highly enriched uranium. In early March, Iran first banned IAEA inspectors after the agency issued a resolution accusing Tehran of secret nuclear activities but later claimed the cancellation of the inspectors visit was due to "technical problems" and agreed to their to return. All this at a time when the United States is keen to accuse Iran of developing a secret weapons programme and wants the IAEA to declare the country in breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

There is little doubt amongst the scientific community that Iran's uranium enriching programme and centrifuges buried underground belie the regime's claims that its nuclear programme is "entirely for peaceful purposes". When IAEA inspectors first found enriched Uranium in Iran's nuclear deposits, the government claimed that this was an accident caused by contamination, and even blamed imported equipment for this contamination. However the quantity and quality of enriched uranium found in Iran contradicted these claims. Of course enriched uranium can be used for commercial reactors (as can plutonium). But NPT countries are not supposed to enrich uranium without mandatory IAEA inspections because of its potential for "dual use".

To make a bomb that will be carried in a missile you need 25kg of highly enriched uranium or 8kg of plutonium. Natural uranium contains less than 0.1% of fissile material. This fraction needs to be increased to 20%-90% to make a weapon. This "enrichment" is what the centrifuges do.

The other route to a nuclear weapon is to create fissile uranium or plutonium in a reactor and use chemical processing to extract it – this is what is done at Sellafield, UK. A number of countries, including France, reuse enriched uranium and plutonium from reprocessed fuel in reactors. The idea is that they are then independent of sources of natural uranium as the "breeder" reactors create more fissile uranium and plutonium than they consume. Iran enriches Uranium above 20 %. This is precisely what can be used for nuclear weapons.

### ***A qualified response***

It is abundantly clear that the US is using Iran's nuclear programme as a pretext to bring about a regime change by "peaceful" means or otherwise. The overthrow of the "axis of evil" – Iraq, Iran and North Korea – and the "taming" or toppling of the next orbit – Cuba, Syria ... and Libya before it confessed all – is central to the imperial ambitions of the neo-conservatives ruling the US.

Moreover the whole issue of nuclear non proliferation should be looked in the context of the entire Middle East, not to say globally. Israel, one of the world's major nuclear powers, gained its nuclear arsenal with help from the apartheid regime in South Africa

in the 1960 and 1970s. Yet it has never admitted possession, never joined a nuclear protocol, and has never faced sanctions or IAEA inspections. As an ally of the United States its nuclear arsenal is considered legitimate. The Israeli navy is currently deploying a submarine equipped with nuclear warheads in the Persian Gulf. There is little doubt that if the United States is given sufficient excuses for bombing Iran's nuclear industries, the Israeli warheads will be used as they were in Iraq in 1992.

Why is Iran, a country with one of the world's largest oil and natural gas deposits, building a nuclear reactor, and planning a nuclear warhead programme. The obvious answer is that this strengthens it against its international adversaries. It may be less apparent that any respite from outside pressure, as well as the very possession of nuclear weapons, strengthens it vis a vis that majority of its own people who want to see an end to the Islamic Republic. An Islamic regime armed with nuclear weapons is more immune to outside plots to overthrow it, but also more impregnable to internal dissent. It is for this reason that it would be difficult to the Islamic Republic to abandon its nuclear ambitions, whatever posture it currently takes in the face of outside pressure.

No one can be in any doubt of the dangers posed by the possession of nuclear weapons in the hands of regimes such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Regimes that feel no responsibility to their people or to the international community are a clear danger to their people and the world when armed to the teeth. Moreover in any conflict between US/UK imperialism and Iran's reactionary clerical regime it is ordinary Iranians who will suffer from the consequences. There are also issues of safety. Engineers and scientists who have worked in Iran's nuclear industry have often complained about lack of safety regulations. The clandestine nature of nuclear developments in Iran only increases the dangers inherent in this industry.

For this reason forces of democracy in Iran cannot watch a potentially nuclear Islamic regime with equanimity. Hence any pressures that aims at preventing this outcome cannot be entirely unwelcome provided it is limited to nuclear weapons alone and not a pretext for expansionist and imperialist policies by the US and its allies.

Neither are pressures to topple the regime in themselves undesirable. It is in the plans for a substitute regime that the obvious differences and clear conflict of interest arise. The US and its allies pursue their own agenda – to impose an alternative regime of their choice on the country. Democratic forces in Iran must clearly oppose this, even though they too fight for a regime change. Therein lies the paradox.

For these reasons the warning by the IAEA, and its protocols to prevent nuclear proliferation, are unacceptable from the point of principle and of legality. Countries who themselves own nuclear weapons are telling others that they cannot, or as in the case of Israel, divide prospective nuclear-states into friends and foe. What this amounts to is that some governments and people have sovereignty while others do not. In international terms, countries are divided into two: fully sovereign and semi-sovereign. This two-tier global order is at the root of the neo-conservative project for their new world order. Therefore what is being proposed by the "global society" on the issue of access to nuclear weapons by other countries is both unprincipled and illegal and hence indefensible.

The solution is clear. At the national level it is not the US or even the UN Security Council that has the right to decide what armaments the country may or may not have. This is an issue for the people of Iran. One need only imagine a genuinely democratic national government in Iran – something that is clearly outside the agenda of the global US empire as an alternative for "rogue states" – to see that it has to have the

means to protect itself against US and other imperialist designs on it. At the level of the Middle East the cessation of all nuclear weapon programmes would be unthinkable without the de-nuclearisation of the entire region – Israel included. At the international level, nuclear non-proliferation is only understandable, and feasible, as part of a global nuclear disarmament programme. Anything less than that is gunboat diplomacy.

The people of Iran and the democratic forces in the country, while they cannot oppose legitimate pressures on Iran to prevent its nuclear weapons programme, can only fight for disarmament as a global phenomenon, not as a selective tool in the hands of empire builders and global capital. Furthermore all progressive and democratic forces in the Middle East must unite in a region-wide anti-war movement, one of whose aims must be to remove all nuclear weapons, alongside foreign military bases, from the entire region.