

Society Outreach invites you to an open discussion on

**'Iran on the footsteps of Israel: What is next –WMD
or Non proliferation'**

Meeting
House of Lords Committee Room 4a
Wednesday 28th of October 2009, at 6.30pm

Speaker: Vijay Mehta
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Other speakers include:
Mohammad Sahebi First Secretary Iran Embassy, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Baqer Moin
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Introduction

Thank you Suaad and Society Outreach for inviting me to speak today. This meeting is very timely as the Iran nuclear issue is at the centre of world politics. We are living in times of great uncertainty with Terrorism, proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan taking centre stage in the International agenda. At present Israel and US are engaged in a military show of strength in what is believed to be the largest ever joint military exercises in land, sea and air in missile defense. There are rumours that this is in preparation of a military strike by Israel on Iran. Not long ago Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, said she was prepared to obliterate Iran. The last thing we want is the continuing stand-off between Iran, Israel and West to turn into a one of the first horrific nuclear wars in the Middle East region. The surprise element is only a matter of timing.

Today the Middle East is on the precipice of Nuclear Proliferation. Israel has 200 nuclear weapons which have never been declared and has a policy of ambiguity for decades. It is well known that Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Tunisia and Yemen have declared that studies are underway for moving down the nuclear development road. With each nuclear stop, mistrust is heightened and suspicions grow in a region prone to distrust. Arabs and Iranians do not see Israeli nuclear weapons as defensive precaution. Whether Iran's goal is peaceful or not the fear and suspicion that nuclear technology brings now threatens to spark an arms race that no one can win.

The West sees the rise of the nuclear Iran as a danger and security risk not just to Israel but entire Middle East and rest of the world. Looking from Iran's point of view, if Israel in the region has 200 or more nuclear weapons, the way to safeguard from a possible attack is to keep on enriching uranium for peaceful energy and keep its option open. The question is can enough trust be build between the West, Iran and Israel where diplomacy and dialogue can triumph for a peaceful future. There is a temporary respite in the standoff as the agreement is being negotiated between Iran and the west which will hopefully give confidence and trust.

What I intend to do it is to explore the stand-off between Iran and west, what are the alternatives and if the dream of a nuclear free or weapons of mass destruction free Middle East can be turned into a reality.

Iran and Nuclear stand-off with the West

Israel and the West state Iran is developing nuclear weapons while Iran has repeatedly stated that their nuclear programme is solely for peaceful civilian purposes. This has been going on for 3 decades. The arguments put forward by the West are as follow.

- Iran today has the 3rd largest reserves of oil in the world and the 2nd second largest reserves of natural gases so why the desire for nuclear power to produce electricity. Iran's answer is that it needs to develop nuclear energy as oil will run out sooner than later. If it has the nuclear energy it can sell oil at a higher price, which makes sense.
- Iran has 6 reactors for domestic production and their Uranium deposits and reserves are only sufficient for 10 – 12 years. You cannot build a whole industry if you are going to get 10 – 12 years out of it. So the argument is it is not for producing electricity but for manufacturing atomic bombs. Iran has denied any such intention. It has repeatedly stated that it will not abandon its right to enrich uranium as the country has a right to civilian nuclear energy, as do all nations.
- Iran according to IAEA had produced 839 kg of low enriched Uranium. By August 2009 that number had reached 1,508 kg. The need for an atomic bomb is 700 kg of low enriched Uranium which you put back into modified centrifuges to enrich the higher enriched weapons grade uranium. 700 kg of low enriched uranium will yield about 20 – 25 kg of weapons-grade uranium, meaning that Iran can now produce 2 atomic bombs. I think if Iranian leaders perceive a severe external threat, they are unlikely to back away from their pursuit of a nuclear option.
- The recent reports of the secret uranium enrichment site constructed near Quam, disclosed by President Obama, has outraged some of the countries in the West. The fact of the matter is that Iran voluntarily informed International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of this facility long time ago. Obama lied that Iranians were covering up a secret nuclear facility.

The rhetoric coming from the Iranian leadership, especially from President Ahmadinejad, and its holocaust denial is not helpful in diffusing the tensions and also adds to the fact that there may be cover-up in the Iran's activities. Iran should be a more open and transparent society, a centre for trade, commerce, and culture.

What are the alternatives for the future stability of the Middle East

- Engage with Iran diplomatically and build trust going forward
- Iran has a right to its civil nuclear energy programme. However, it should keep it transparent and open to supervision by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

- Iran should buy low enriched Uranium from the world market instead of mining it. It clears all the suspicion in the eyes of the international community.
- All parties should keep away from rhetoric, provocations, threats, acts of terrorism and proxy wars
- Israel need to come clean and declare its nuclear arsenal and the amount of enriched Uranium it has. It also need to end the illegal, unjust annexation of occupied territories.
- The international community need to condemn Israel (who never declared its stock of nuclear weapons), India and Pakistan for possessing nuclear weapons. On the contrary, these countries are given help with nuclear technology know-how. The only countries always condemned are Iran, North Korea, and Syria. It is time these countries are not marginalised and become part of International community
- There should be an end or relaxation of sanctions inviting more investments in the vital oil and gas sector of Iran.
- The energy needs of the Middle East can be met by using the enormous power of sun and wind instead of resorting to the disastrous nuclear path. It leaves a legacy of deadly radioactive waste to be dealt with for thousands of years. This should be a priority
- All parties should stop the endless cycle of talks on nuclear programmes which has been going on for 3 decades and conclude agreement for nuclear disarmament which should lead to a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.

Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) - a dream or a reality

In 1974, Iran under the Shah, with Egypt's near immediate support, became the first to propose an NWFZ in the Middle East to the UN General Assembly. Israel abstained from votes on the resolution for several years but then suddenly produced its own draft in 1980, asking for direct negotiations between the countries in the region rather than installing a zone by universal consensus. After negotiations with Egypt, the Israeli draft of the resolution was withdrawn, and for the first time, all of the countries in the region voted unanimously in favour of a slightly revised Egyptian draft. Nevertheless, little political progress ensued.

One decade later, a UN expert study explored the complex issues involved in establishing such a zone and in 1991 proposed a series of measures to approach this lofty goal in an incremental way. At the same time, motivated by mounting evidence of the existence of chemical and biological weapons in the region and Israel's apparent interpretation of its own nuclear capability as a deterrent against these weapons, Egypt's president, Husni Mubarak, proposed to the international community to enlarge the concept of an NWFZ into a "zone free of weapons of

mass destruction.” However, overall the talks failed owing to the profound differences of the parties, notably Egypt and Israel on the relationship among nuclear disarmament, general arms control and peace.

Although Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons is not inevitable, other countries’ worries about a nuclear-armed Iran could lead states in the region to develop new security arrangements with external powers, acquire additional weapons, and consider pursuing their own nuclear ambitions. It is not clear that the type of stable deterrent relationship that existed between the great powers for most of the Cold War would emerge naturally in the Middle East with a nuclear-weapons capable Iran. Episodes of low-intensity conflict taking place under a nuclear umbrella could lead to an unintended escalation and broader conflict if clear red lines between those states involved are not well established.

The present nuclear situation in the Middle East is neither stable nor tenable. Israel’s deterrent policy has failed in many respects, and the efforts of other states to acquire nuclear weapons or other WMD has further destabilized the region. The escalation of regional violence demonstrates that neither the status quo nor the prevailing alternative strategies are in line with either side’s security and welfare interests. Under these circumstances, the proposal for an NWFZ and a WMDFZ, utopian as it may seem, warrants a fresh and serious look. The fate of the proposals is closely coupled with the peace process at large. To develop them, fundamental shifts in the basic positions of both sides are required.

An end to terrorism and occupation are probably the two key elements necessary to move both the peace process and the negotiation process on prohibiting WMD in the region forward in tandem. Even a good start, however, leaves the parties with many difficult issues with which to grapple, and obvious solutions do not abound. Enforcement is a case in point. In other areas, such as verification, multiple models are on the table, such as adopting the regional verification system as opposed to the one contained in the Non-nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or entrusting enforcement to the parties themselves; an international body; or another, powerful actor. Nevertheless, because of their different qualities, reaching an agreement will not be easy. Even if a fundamental shift in basic political positions, probably resulting from strong outside pressure, were to occur, such a zone would not appear immediately. It will need to follow a long and protracted process of relatively small steps, involving procedure, substance, and practice, occurring in succession.

Conclusion

Nuclear weapons have different symbolic meanings for the parties involved. For Israel, they are the ultimate guarantor of national survival against hostile Arab and Iranian neighbours that are superior in human and financial resources. Only a lasting

and sustainable peace could mitigate and satisfy this concern to a degree that Israel might be willing to put its nuclear capability on the negotiating table. As long as terrorists continue to harm Israeli civilians, however, and Iran and Arab governments continue to condone, if not support, these terrorist attacks, many Israelis will see their neighbours' quest for peace as a rhetorical ruse aimed at disarming Israel while seeking the ultimate goal of its destruction.

The memory of the Holocaust, the worst genocide in human history, sustains this fear in indelibly sharp relief and leads many Israelis to believe that nuclear weapons will shield them from a future holocaust. However, the recent war proved the uselessness of the nuclear arsenal. On the Arab side, which has grudgingly come to accept Israel's existence as a matter of fact, perceptions are quite different. If Israel has any concerns about national security, it's still growing conventional superiority over its neighbours, proven in a series of victorious wars, should provide all the assurance necessary. Thus, the Arab and Iranian worlds view Israel's nuclear weapons not as a last-resort deterrent, but rather as a protective umbrella under which the illegal and unjust annexation of the occupied territories continues. Arabs and Iranians do not see Israel's nuclear weapons as a defensive precaution under which Israel can explore possibilities for peace. Instead, they see an offensive instrument that impedes Israel's willingness to return to its early 1967 borders, which the Arab side believes is the core part of the only peace possible.

The actions of domestic forces on either side strengthen these respective perceptions. Elements in Arab societies, frequently motivated by fanatic and extremist interpretations of Islam, do indeed want to destroy Israel. Extremist elements in Israeli society, many of them equally motivated by a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, would violently oppose a withdrawal from the occupied territories. The existence of these groups has further inflamed hostilities, making an NWFZ, much less broader peace, more remote; strengthening existing images of the enemy; and enhancing distrust.

Let me quote Hans Blix who said and I quote: "I do not underestimate the problems of a zonal agreement – for instance those of verification, or outside assurances about security and the supply of uranium fuel. Yet the Obama administration, with the support of many governments, is seeking nuclear disarmament for all – including the original sinners – and both non-proliferation and disarmament are now on the agenda of the UN Security Council. The Middle East looks like a region in need of a bold broad approach."

Israel and Iran's officials have held secret talks recently to explore the possibility of declaring the Middle East a nuclear Free Zone. This has been reported by Israeli newspaper, Haaratz and also leaked by Australian Daily Age. I hope they continue

the negotiations to resolve the urgent issues in the Middle East for strengthening the non-proliferation regime and working towards Middle East nuclear free zone.

Let me conclude with a positive note by reciting a poem by one of the most inspiring, and greatest Persian poets of the 13th century, Jalal-ad-Din-ar-Rumi who said about divine love which transcends religious differences. I quote

*The religion of love is apart from all religions:
For lovers (the only) religion and creed is god*

*'Not Christian or Jew or Muslim
Not Hindu, Buddhist, Sufi or Zen
Not any religion or cultural system
I am not from the east or the west...
I belong to be beloved
And have seen the two worlds as one*

If we follow Rumi's words of wisdom, we can all live in a safer world

Thank you for listening.

Notes and bio on back page.

Notes

The following publications were consulted and excerpts have been taken from them during the writing of this article:

1. The Washington Quarterly, A Nuclear Weapons–Free Zone in the Middle East: A Pie in the Sky? Winter 2004-05
2. A talk by Vijay Mehta, “Working for a world free of nuclear weapons – what can the United Nations and civil society do?” 21st September 2009 Universal Peace Federation 43 Lancaster Gate, London, W2 3NA
3. Newsweek, ‘Containing Nuclear Iran,’ Fareed Zakaria, 12 October 2009
4. BBC News, “Iran nuclear fuel deal agreed,” 22nd October 2009

Biography: Vijay Mehta

Vijay Mehta is president of VM Centre for Peace www.vmpeace.org , Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity www.fortuneforum.org , Chair of Action for UN Renewal www.action-for-un-renewal.org.uk and co-Chair of World Disarmament Campaign. He is an author, a champion for truth and global activist for peace, development, human rights and environment. Some of his notable books are The Fortune Forum Summit: For a Sustainable Future, Arms No More, and The United Nations and Its Future in the 21st Century.

His latest book is on Global Warming and is called ‘Climate Change IQ,’ which is available to download free of charge in electronic form from the website www.climatechange365.co.uk

He along with his daughter Renu Mehta founder of Fortune Forum charity held three summits in London in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The summits raised over a million pounds for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US President and Al Gore, former US vice-President, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007. The guest speakers in 2008 were Ted Turner, Founder of CNN, Amritya Sen and Sir James Mirrlees both Nobel Prize winning Economists.

Vijay Mehta has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajtak-24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Sunday Times, Independent, Observer, Irish Times and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet.