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By R. NASTRANIS

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By JULIO GODOY

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By JOHN FEFFER

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For China Mutual Respect Is Key

By Ernest Corea*

WASHINGTON DC - He came, he listened, he bought soybeans. That would be a reasonably accurate but cynical summary report of the February 13-17 visit to the US by China's Vice President Xi Jinping. It would miss out, of course, on other aspects of the visit, the complexities and nuances of the bilateral relationship, and its significance in broad global terms.

(About soybeans: When Xi visited Iowa, where he had stayed when he previously visited on an agricultural mission, officials accompanying him this time around, signed agreements under which China will buy up to 20 million tons of soybeans. Ironically, agricultural scientists consider China to be the original home of soybean.)

Xi's visit was hosted by Vice President Joe Biden who was earlier Xi's guest in China (2011). Thus, it lacked the ceremonial rituals of a state visit. For that, he will have to await his actual elevation to China's presidency which is considered a certainty — barring some unforeseen political upheaval in Beijing.

For now, Xi's visit had to be no more than a "meet and greet" event accompanied, by opportunities for carefully managed exposure to the US political and trade leadership, and for high level discussions (with President Obama, among others) on some of the issues that bedevil bilateral relations.

These include US concerns about China's trade practices, currency rates, patent and trade mark infringements, gross human rights violations, military posturing in the Asia-Pacific, and diplomatic clashes.

China is also concerned about US trade practices (such as not permitting certain types of high technology sales), military posturing in the Asia-Pacific area, continued strategic relationship with the government in Taiwan, perceived support for Tibetan "splittism," and diplomatic clashes.

Although Xi is described as being more comfortable when he is not tied down to a script, he was not given the opportunity to speak unscripted at a press conference where his capacity for "ad libbing" would have been tested.

Four Decades

Xi's visit took place 40 years after President Nixon's "breakthrough" visit to Beijing which ended the pretense that Taiwan is China and China is not, acknowledged the existence of one China — represented by the People's Republic — not two, formally recognized the People's Republic as a major player in world affairs, and paved the way for China to make a "great leap forward" on the economic front.

Xi's stay in the US included a stopover at the White House on Valentine's Day, February 14, causing a flurry of comments and expectations that like the young lovers who exchange copious amounts of chocolates in symbolic gestures of sweet togetherness, Obama and Xi would go all lovey-dovey. Secretary of State Clinton was among those who switched from realism to mild sentimentality for the occasion.

It takes much more than Valentine's Day frivolity, however, to develop and cement a bilateral relationship. What the US State Department wants from Xi's government, for instance, is not a box of chocolates or a lovely bunch of roses but a visa for Susan Johnson Cook, the US ambassador at large for international religious freedom to visit China. Her visa application was "frozen."

Xi's visit took place immediately after a Security Council resolution aimed at ending the bloodshed in Syria failed, thus not only rendering the council ineffective but also offending the Arab League whose diplomats helped to draft the resolution.

Voting was 13 to two in favour of the resolution, but the two negative votes cast by China and Russia constituted a double veto. Eight hundred more Syrians died in the conflict the next day. UN Secretary General Ban condemned the council's failure to adopt the resolution. US permanent representative Susan Rice called the vetoes outrageous. (The US, however, is the UN's "veto champion," particularly when it comes to protecting Israel.)

'Sound and Stable'

On the Chinese side, the official assessment of the bilateral relationship as publicly stated on the eve of Xi's visit was positive. The confident and upbeat approach to the relationship was clear in the official transcript of answers to a set of questions submitted to Xi by the Washington Post at the request of the Chinese government. The transcript was published on February 13. Xi asserted that in the 40 years since Nixon's visit to China, "bilateral relations have forged ahead despite some twists and turns and made historic achievements bringing huge benefits to both countries and peoples. China-US relations have become one of the most important, dynamic and promising bilateral relationships in today's world."

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"What happened over the past 40 years tells us that a sound and stable China-US relationship is crucial for both countries and for peace, stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large."

He pointed out that between 1985 when he first visited the US and now, the value of bilateral trade had risen from $77 billion to $440 billion. In the same period, he said, "mutual visits" rose from 10,000 to over 3 million.

Separately, China Daily in its February 10-12 weekend edition, quoted deputy foreign minister Cui Tiankai as saying that Xi's visit "will present a very important opportunity to enhance mutual trust." Cui said as well that "the (current) level of mutual trust is lagging behind what is required for the further development of (our) bilateral relations."

The purpose of Xi's visit, Cui told a media briefing in Beijing, "is to further advance the cooperative partnership that is based on mutual respect and mutual benefits."

**Spousal Preference**

The official view is in harmony, more or less, with public perceptions. Recent surveys indicate that over 90 percent of China's population considers the bilateral relationship important, and would support further cooperation. Areas most favoured for collaboration are the economy and energy (67 percent), culture, education and science (64 percent), and diplomacy (63 percent).

A substantial minority of Chinese (40 percent) would like to marry Americans. Slightly over 70 percent believe that US culture has a positive influence on China. This is 18 percentage points higher than the comparable figure in 2007.

On the US side, Richard Wike, Associate Director of the Pew Research Centre's Global Attitudes Project, when asked "how do Americans view China?" responded: "On balance, Americans rate China favourably. A survey conducted in March and April 2011 by the Pew Research Centre's Global Attitudes Project found that 51 percent expressed a positive opinion of China, while 36 percent offered a negative rating."

"But Americans have real concerns about China's economic might – 53 percent said China's economic growth is bad for the US. When it comes to the countries that Americans see posing the most danger to the US, 22 percent cited China in a January 2012 poll by the Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press, about the same as did so in 2011 (Iran was at the top of the list at 28 percent)."

The US corporate sector is highly supportive of stronger trade and investment ties with China. "Foreign investment already supports 5 million direct jobs and millions of indirect jobs. We need to negotiate more bilateral investment treaties," Thomas Donahue, president and CEO of US Chamber of Commerce said in his annual State of American Business speech.

**Loud Grumbles**

Although mutual concerns were addressed during Xi's meetings with Obama and Biden, there were no public histrionics. The Chinese are well aware, however, of the xenophobic rhetoric on the Republican campaign trail.

The decibel level of grumbles against the trend of American manufacturing migrating to China is likely to rise when the Democratic/Republican contest begins in earnest. Obama has already launched a campaign for manufacturing to be in-sourced – brought back to the US, primarily from China.

Some of the practices that sully bilateral relations are more easily addressed than others. For example, anybody who has visited China would have noted that effective policing can end the widespread practice of "knock-offs" of a wide range of manufactured items from underwear to electronics being openly sold.

Some issues have emotional overtones. The People's Republic suspects that the agitation for a "free" Tibet is externally manipulated, and will not change their policy on the permanent nature of Tibet's position within the Chinese polity.

The fact that Ambassador Cook's visa application was held up demonstrates the sensitivity of the People's Republic at the possibility of intrusive religious activism, however diplomatically conducted. (The Chinese are not alone on this point.)

The continued strategic relationship between the US and Taiwan causes political aggravation in Beijing because the relationship, which includes direct arms sales to the Taiwanese, contradicts the fundamental premise that Taiwan is a part of China and not a separate political entity. Even if the People's Republic could prove that history is on its side, the "Taiwan lobby" is still strong enough to campaign against any change in the US-Taiwan relationship.

The issue of human rights is tricky as well. The US Government considers human rights considerations inviolable. Few Chinese officials know as much about the consequence of human rights deprivation as Xi does. His father, a hero of China's revolution, was later imprisoned for 16 years by Chairman Mao. But Xi espouses the official line, obviously, whatever his personal feelings might be. **Continued on page 6**
China Dislikes Indo-U.S. Military Cooperation

By Alicia Wong

SHANGHAI - Despite the unresolved border conflict, China and India have made "significant" progress in their bilateral relations. But U.S.-led multinational military collaborations in the region, including India, threaten to have "a complicated and in-depth influence", according to a Chinese think-tank.

"In recent years, China and India's cooperation has made significant achievements in various areas and both countries have maintained good coordination and cooperation in dealing with major international affairs, including border issues," says Hu Zhiyong, associate professor at the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies under the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

An "edited and translated" version of the article, which first appeared in the Jiefang Daily of the Shanghai Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), was carried by People's Daily Online on February 20. It was headlined "China, India should treat competition rationally".

Hu, an expert on China-India relations, however cautions: "Of course, we must clearly realize that, despite the improvement of the bilateral relations in these years, the voices of fearing China, voices suspecting China and opposing China could still be heard in many places in India."

Nevertheless, he adds: "... these voices cannot change the mainstream viewpoint of India." Because: "Far-sighted governmental officials of India propose to desert the Cold War mentality and rationally consider competition between China and India to promote the development of the China-India relations."

Reiterating caution, he says: "The world has entered the second decade of the 21st century, and the development of the China-India relations is being tested by the United States' strategic adjustment in the Asia-Pacific Region, which will have a complicated and in-depth influence on the future of China-India relations."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

China places the issue in the context of its own perception of the need to maintain a balance between national security concerns and human rights. The US has on occasion veered round to this position, as in the use of torture and rendition, and the complex debacle that is encapsulated by the single word: Guantanamo.

Four Pillars

Xi was too polite a visitor and too skilled a politician to be publicly agitated over any of these prickly issues. Where the US Government expressed concern his reaction was to say that action had already been taken and more could and would follow. His comments were splattered, however, with direct references to "mutual respect, mutual interests, and mutual benefits."

He also laid out four potential pillars of collaboration. Here is a summary:

First: continue to increase China-US mutual understanding.

Second, respect each other's core interests.

Third, strive to deepen the mutually beneficial and win-win pattern of China-US cooperation.

Fourth, continue to strengthen coordination and cooperation in international affairs and global issues.

The full version of these summary points may be accessed at http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/t906012.htm.

Consider This

So, let's consider this.

The US and China cannot be strategic allies in the foreseeable future; there is too much that divides them. The US is also obliged by a number of compulsions to maintain a balance between its relations with China and its dealings with other Asian nations.

The US and China cannot nurture strategic hostility; that would eventually lead to a flare-up, big or small.

They can, however, maintain strategic partnerships when an honest calculation of national interests shows the clear existence of symmetries.

Xi listed a number of areas in which the US and China have already collaborated. They included: climate change, denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and the development of and possession of nuclear weapons by any Middle East country. He said, too, that there has been US-China coordination "in addressing such hot spot issues as Afghanistan, South Asia, Sudan, and the Middle East."

A foreign service officer who has served in China points out that in his experience when the national interests of the two countries are congruent, China does not hesitate to be a collaborative partner. For the 21st century, a continuation of this approach is worth pursuing. Unfortunately, in politics and diplomacy, not everything that's worth doing gets done.
Hu is referring to a "high-profile announcement" by the United States "to return to the Asia-Pacific region" in 2010. Besides, Washington had hosted the first U.S.-Japan-India trilateral dialogue last year. "One of the main topics of the dialogue is on how to deal with China's growing global military and political status. India's participation put it into the 'diplomatic network' jointly established by the United States and Japan with the purpose of besieging China," notes Hu.

The United States had introduced a new military strategy earlier in 2012, aiming to shift its military focus to the Asian-Pacific region. Subsequently, writes Hu, "U.S.-led multinational military cooperations, including U.S.-Australia-India cooperation and U.S.-Japan-India cooperation, have gradually become more institutionalized and normalized. The United States is now actively building a new Asia-Pacific strategic structure in favour of itself and accelerating its pace of strategic eastward."

Without overtly urging India not to be a part of the U.S. strategy, Hu writes: "Both China and India are the world's largest developing countries and emerging economies. The two countries have many common strategic interests, notwithstanding certain differences. China and India have similar views and common strategic needs in many aspects of international affairs, and share common understanding and value judgments in quite many fields. For example, both are unanimous in opposing unipolar world while supporting a multipolar world; both need a stable and peaceful environment for development and advocate establishing a harmonious surrounding environment."

To this end, he adds, the possibility of China-India friendly cooperation is much greater than indulging in conflicts and war. "Therefore, China and India need to deal with bilateral relations from a strategic perspective and actively adopt pragmatic foreign policies based on mutual cooperation and strategic partnership to achieve a deeper and deeper Sino-Indian relationship. This will be conducive to create a mutual trust and benefit featured Asian security environment and deter penetration from foreign powers who attempt to interfere with Asian affairs."

Significance of this article also lies in the fact that it has been published in run-up to the New Delhi summit meeting of the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) on March 29, which will be the first major diplomatic event India will host in 2012.

The first summit of the grouping was held in 2009 in Russia, with the heads of government from Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC). The same four leaders met for the second summit in Brazil in 2010. In 2011, with China as the host, South Africa attended for the first time, adding an 'S' to BRIC.

The fourth summit at New Delhi is expected to focus on international terrorism, climate change and food and energy security. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India has pointed out that the BRICS countries share similar positions on many issues.

These include reform of the Bretton Woods institutions (IMF and the World Bank), trade protectionism and the Doha Development Round, achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and support for a multi-polar, equitable and democratic world order. The prime minister stressed that against the backdrop of these global challenges, it is "all the more essential for BRICS countries to closely consult with each other."  

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The Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies

Established in 1990, the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies has research offices of East Asia, International Organizations, International Relations Theory, and Taiwan Issues, it also has research centers for Japan and Korean Peninsula, and is authorized to confer masterate in Intersectional Relations. The Institute administers the APEC Research Center which was founded in 2000, upon the approval of the Shanghai Municipal Government, to coordinate the research resources in the Academy to study the development of APEC and China’s policy toward and participation in APEC, it is the third APEC research center in China, a member state of APEC.

The Institute’s main research orientation heads toward international relations, international strategies, international organizations and economic cooperation in East Asia, its research sphere covers diplomacy, security, theories of international relations, and economy, and lays particular emphasis on the study of diplomacy and state security strategies. The Institute strives to be in the lead of the institutions studying the international relations, international strategies and international systems in the Asia-Pacific Region. The Institute has a staff of 20, of them 5 research fellows, 4 associate research fellows, 10 with doctorate and 7 with masterate.
TOKYO - Leaders of the six nations that share the Mekong River have agreed on a 10-year plan to boost growth, promote development and reduce poverty in the region comprising Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Viet Nam, and China's Yunnan and Guangxi regions.

The decision was taken at the fourth Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Summit in Manila, the Philippines. In a joint declaration, GMS leaders endorsed a strategic framework for 2012 to 2022 that calls for a range of new measures to strengthen regional cooperation, including more effective resource utilization and more careful balancing of development with environmental concerns. GMS is a natural economic area bound together by the Mekong River, covering 2.6 million square kilometers and a combined population of around 326 million.


GMS leaders also endorsed strategies to enhance agricultural development, including food safety and security; accelerate the development and implementation of the pro-poor sustainable tourism industry, with the creation of multi-country tour packages to help spread revenues more widely; and promote low-carbon development and enhance management of the sub-region's richly diverse ecosystems, the ADB informed on December 20, 2012.

The significance of the GMS Summit lies in that in countries of the region increasingly, modernization and industrialization are emerging from a process of transition and transformation. The Mekong countries are gradually shifting from subsistence farming to more diversified economies, and to more open, market-based systems. In parallel with this are the growing commercial relations among the six Mekong countries, notably in terms of cross-border trade, investment, and labor mobility. Moreover, natural resources, particularly hydropower, are beginning to be developed and utilized on a subregional basis.

The rich human and natural resource endowments of the Mekong region have made it a new frontier of Asian economic growth. Indeed, the Mekong region has the potential to be one of the world's fastest growing areas.

Two days after the conclusion of the Summit, ADB said it will provide a $3 million grant to support emergency relief efforts in the aftermath of tropical storm Sendong, also known internationally as Washi, which recently struck the southern Philippines.

ADB assistance will be channeled through the Government of the Philippines to provide clean water, health services, medical supplies and other essential emergency items to the affected households.

"As a development partner of the Philippines, we are extending immediate help to poor families that have borne disproportionate impact of the disaster during this festive season," said Neeraj Jain, ADB's Country Director for the Philippines.

ADB has also assured the Government of the Philippines of its continued support during the subsequent reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, including effective early warning systems and measures that would reduce the risk of future disasters.

The $3 million grant is being provided under ADB's emergency facility, the Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund, which provides quick-disbursing grants to help restore essential life-saving services following major natural disasters.

Since its inception in 1992, the GMS program has helped bring an area once divided by conflict increasingly together with investments of about $14 billion in projects with broad subregional benefits, including roads, airports and railways; telecommunications; energy; urban development; tourism; environmental protection; and the prevention of communicable diseases.

Since the start of the economic cooperation program, gross domestic product growth in the subregion has averaged about 8% a year, while real per capita incomes more than tripled between 1993 and 2010. As of September 2011, ADB assistance for the program totaled about $5 billion.

In 1992, with assistance from ADB, the six GMS countries entered into a program of subregional economic cooperation, designed to enhance economic relations among the countries. With support from ADB and other donors, the GMS Program helps the implementation of high priority subregional projects in transport, energy, telecommunications, environment, human resource development, tourism, trade, private sector investment, and agriculture.

ADB says that substantial progress has been achieved in terms of implementing GMS projects since 1992. Priority infrastructure projects worth around US$10 billion have either been completed or are being implemented. Among these are the upgrading of the Phnom Penh (Cambodia)-Ho Chi Minh City (Viet Nam) highway and the East-West Economic Corridor that will eventually extend from the Andaman Sea to Da Nang.

The subregion embraces flora and fauna that have expanded northward along the Malay Peninsula into Thailand, encroached upon the high mountains from the Himalayas, or advanced along the broad river valleys as dry deciduous forests similar to those of India. Ten million years of changing sea levels have left a rich legacy of unique life forms that have evolved in isolation on the Cardamom and Annamite mountains of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam. These resources provide both income and sustenance to the great majority of people in the subregion who are leading subsistence or near subsistence agricultural lifestyles.
IMF Seeks Asia's Help to Tackle Eurocrisis

By J. C. Suresh

TORONTO – When an international commission headed by Nobel laureate Willy Brandt drew attention to global economic interdependence in its report in 1980, the world was divided between rich North and the poor South. More than three decades later, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is asking what were until recently developing countries to help stave off the European financial crisis resulting in the global economy sinking like Titanic.

The Fund is looking to work ever more closely with Asia to lessen the impact of the global crisis on the region and to help promote sounder and stronger growth globally, David Lipton, IMF First Deputy Managing Director, had said.

Lipton, who was appointed late last year to the IMF management position, told participants at Asian Financial Forum in Hong Kong that “Asia’s economies today are strong and showing great promise, in part because of the reforms introduced courageously, and not without painful consequences, when Asia faced its own crisis in the nineties.”

He added: “But now it is problems in the rest of the world, Europe in particular, that pose a risk to Asian prosperity. Now, Asia has a stake in seeing Europe solve its problems and in playing a role in that process.”

Beyond that, Lipton cautioned, Asia has its own challenges, both in the near and longer term, but "by working together, more and better than in the past, Asia and the IMF can help ensure stability and prosperity for the region and for the world," he added. Reflecting on the global outlook, Lipton observed that “at the global level, the pace of economic activity is weakening, and the risks for Europe and the world are high.”

But, he emphasized, “rather than allow ourselves to be paralyzed by pessimism, it is time to focus on the more hopeful perspective of working our way through this crisis. If there is good news, it is that we know what policies are needed, and we are busy trying to muster the finance to support those policies.”

Without bold action however, “Europe could be swept into a downward spiral of collapsing confidence, stagnant growth, and fewer jobs. And in today’s interconnected global economy, no country and no region would be immune from that catastrophe. This is especially true for Asia,” Lipton said, reflecting its tight trade and financial links with Europe.

The IMF official pointed out that Asia had emerged from the 2008 financial crisis with its global standing strengthened and called on Asian policy makers to stay the course with fiscal normalization to rebuild buffers eroded since the 2008 crisis; pause monetary tightening as long as inflation forecasts remained within central banks' targets; ensure liquidity and funding in the banking sector; and further reduce external vulnerabilities by lengthening debt maturities, securing credit lines and further expanding currency swap arrangements, either bilaterally or through the multilateral Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI).

CMI is a multilateral currency swap arrangement among the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the People’s Republic of China (including Hong Kong), Japan, and South Korea. It draws from a foreign exchange reserves pool worth US$120 billion and was launched on March 24, 2010.

The initiative began as a series of bilateral swap arrangements after the ASEAN Plus Three countries met on May 6, 2000 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, at an annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank. After 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, member countries started this initiative to manage regional short-term liquidity problems and to facilitate the work of other international financial arrangements and organizations like International Monetary Fund.

Lipton added that “should downside risks materialize in force, policymakers in Asia would need to respond swiftly, as they did in 2008/2009.” “As Asia goes forward, the IMF stands ready to be a partner,” Lipton said, adding that “the IMF learned important lessons from Asia’s experience that we are now applying to programs across the globe, including in Europe.”

Two areas he singled out where the IMF’s work can support the region’s interests are enhancing economic and financial surveillance for crisis prevention, and strengthening the global financial safety net – including sharper surveillance of economic spillovers and macro-financial linkages, but also new lending tools, such as the precautionary credit line, specifically tailored for crisis by-standers.

Efforts are also underway to better integrate IMF resources with regional reserve pooling arrangements like the Chiang Mai Initiative and enhance cooperation with them. At the same time, Asia looks set to take a bigger role at the IMF, Lipton said. He noted the importance of an increased role for Asian members within the IMF, which is reflected among other recent developments in the package of quota and voice reforms that were agreed in 2010.

These reforms will increase emerging Asia’s representation by more than a quarter, with Japan and China the second- and third-largest shareholders and India also in the top ten. Asian nationals are now 40 percent of the IMF’s management team, and the IMF will hold its 2012 Annual Meetings in Tokyo in October 2012. “Given its rise as an economic powerhouse, it is only natural that Asia’s voice in the IMF should become increasingly influential,” Lipton noted.

While all eyes are on Europe right now, “by working more and better together, Asia and the Fund can help bring about sustained economic growth for the region and for the world,” Lipton said.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES | MARCH [INCLUDING FEBRUARY] 2012
Weapons Sales to Africa Small But Dangerous

By Jamshed Baruah

BERLIN - South Africa is not only the largest importer of weapons but also the only country in sub-Saharan Africa producing a wide range of military equipment, says a report by the prestigious Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Lethal arms flows to sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa, accounted for 3.4 percent of the global volume of imports of major weapons between 2006 and 2010. Excluding South Africa, the region’s share shrinks to 1.5 percent.

Between 2006 and 2010, South Africa purchased 15 JAS-39 combat aircraft (as part of a total order of 26), 24 Hawk-100 trainer combat aircraft, 2 Type-209 submarines (of a total order of 3) and 4 MEKO-A200 frigates, says the report by Pieter D. Wezeman and Siemon T. Wezeman from the Netherlands and Lucie Béraud-Sudreau from France.

“Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom accounted for, respectively, 63, 18 and 11 per cent of South African imports of major arms during this period. When including South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa, Germany was the largest supplier and Sweden the third largest during 2006–10. However, neither Germany nor Sweden supplied major arms to any other country in the region,” states the report titled Arms Flows to Sub-Saharan Africa.

South Africa is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa that has developed a sizeable arms industry capable of producing relatively advanced military equipment that can compete on the global market. In 2007 it was reported that 13,646 people worked in the South African arms industry.

The report points out that in sub-Saharan Africa, which has virtually no arms industry of their own, states have received major arms through legal transfers from a wide variety of countries worldwide. During 2006-2010 China accounted for 25%, Ukraine for 20% and Russia for 11% of the volume of major arms supplied to the region.

Significant numbers of small arms and light weapons were also supplied to both governments and rebel forces in the region. These included at least 220 000 assault rifles which were delivered to at least 34 countries in the region.

The authors of the report have not come across any hard evidence that there were widespread large illegal supplies from outside the region in 2006-2010, but there have been regular instances of illegal weapons flows inside the region, says the report released in December 2011.
"Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom accounted for, respectively, 63, 18 and 11 per cent of South African imports of major arms . . . . When including South Africa in sub-Saharan Africa, Germany was the largest supplier and Sweden the third largest during 2006–10. However, neither Germany nor Sweden supplied major arms to any other country in the region," states the report titled Arms Flows to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Risks

"A key challenge to understanding the motives for and impact of arms procurement in sub-Saharan Africa is the lack of transparency by arms suppliers and recipients," states Pieter Wezeman of the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme, the lead author of the report. "We cannot have a meaningful debate about African military needs and arms control when states are so secretive."

Even small amounts of arms can have a significant impact on peace and security in the region, adds the report, and therefore stresses the need for greater transparency in exports and procurement so that much needed controls can be improved.

Based on a survey of recent arms supplies to conflict areas, the report underlines the uncertainty about the impact of arms supplies to the region: "Arms supplies may have contributed to efforts to restore stability, in particular when helping to improve the capabilities of international peacekeepers."

"However, the supply of arms can also be an incentive for the recipients to try to achieve their goals via violence instead of dialogue, the arms can fuel human rights violations, and arms recipients often cannot secure their stockpiles and many weapons have been lost or stolen, including by rebel groups," adds report.

The study finds that most transfers to sub-Saharan African countries are not reported by the importers to the United Nations as part of established confidence-building measures between states.

"Arms should be acquired for genuine security purposes, such as self-defence, to maintain internal security or to be able to participate in international peace operations and they must be suited for the envisaged tasks, according to the report," states the report.

However, sub-Saharan African states are highly secretive about their arms procurement policies. This makes it hard to assess them. "African states have supported calls for international transparency in arms procurement to enhance confidence between states, but then they have not lived up to these ideals," states Siemon Wezeman, co-author of the report.

The significance of the report lies in the fact that armed conflict and military regimes are perceived to be prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. A consequence of this perception is that any transfer of arms to the region – irrespective of its volume – tends to raise questions about whether they will help to provoke or prolong armed conflicts, aggravate inter- and intrastate tensions, or weaken civilian led governments.

"These questions are fuelled by the failure of many governments in the region – regardless of whether the state is in armed conflict or has poor relations with its neighbours – to share information on their arms acquisition plans and motives," says the report.

Secrecy

Answering these questions requires a broad overview of recent developments in arms flows to sub-Saharan Africa, including objective and verifiable information and analysis. But to date, no such overview has been published.

Relevant research has consisted of ad hoc studies on specific countries or regions conducted by, for example, United Nations panels monitoring arms embargoes, research institutes and advocacy groups.

"This lack is not surprising because collecting information about arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa, as for other regions of the world, poses a series of challenges and is a time-consuming process. The most serious challenge is the habit of secrecy that surrounds arms acquisitions in most states in the region," says the report.

It adds: Many of the concerns regarding arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa are reflected at the global level, where they have fuelled a worldwide debate and policymaking efforts aimed at controlling arms flows.

In efforts to prevent and end conflicts, the control of arms flows has often been used as a tool in the form of national export and import regulations, multilateral arms export and import regimes, UN arms embargoes, and initiatives to stem the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

The widely recognized need to control international arms flows has also led to the worldwide intergovernmental debate about the feasibility of an arms trade treaty (ATT), which would establish common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms.
NATO Committed to Counter-Piracy Mission

By Jaya Ramachandran

BERLIN - Though there have been reductions in piracy, "NATO remains committed to the counter-piracy mission, and our ships will continue to sail in the area off the coast of Africa for the foreseeable future," says Admiral James Stavridis, one of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's two strategic commanders.

The reason: Somali pirates continue to account for the majority of attacks in East and West Africa. A military solution should however be accompanied by supporting local development of villages that have gained little from hosting pirates, he added expressing his interest in the findings of a paper titled 'Treasure Mapped: Using Satellite Imagery to Track the Developmental Effects of Somali Piracy', published by Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs, better known as Chatham House.

The report's author Anjay Shorland writes: "A negotiated solution to the piracy problem should aim to exploit local disappointment among coastal communities regarding the economic benefits from piracy and offer them an alternative that brings them far greater benefits than hosting pirates does. A military crack-down on the other hand would deprive one of the world’s poorest nations of an important source of income and aggravate poverty."

Replying to a question by IDN on the sidelines of a conference in Berlin on January 24, 2011, Admiral Stavridis said the success of NATO's counter-conspiracy mission was underlined by the fact that the number of successful hijackings by Somali pirates had decreased from 49 in 2010 to 28 in 2011.

Earlier in December he stated in Five Key NATO Events in 2011 posted on the web: "Success rates for (hijacking) attacks have dropped considerably, and there are fewer attacks than during this period last year. Some of the reasons for this include patrolling by NATO, EU, and various national forces at sea; pressure ashore militarily and in the area of development; better practices at sea by civilian mariners (convoys and citadels, for example); and the addition of armed security teams."

The International Maritime Bureau’s (IMB) global piracy report revealed on January 19, 2012 that pirate attacks against vessels in East and West Africa accounted for the majority of world attacks in 2011, Of the 439 attacks reported to the IMB in 2011, 275 attacks took place off Somalia on the east coast and in the Gulf of Guinea on the west coast of Africa.

The report showed a slight drop in the total number of recorded incidents of piracy and armed robbery worldwide, comparing the 439 recorded incidents of piracy and armed robbery in 2011 to 445 in 2010. "The falling numbers come after four consecutive years of increased piracy and armed robbery worldwide," the report averred.
It explained that the 802 crew members taken hostage in 2011 also marks a decrease from the four-year high of 1,181 in 2010. "Overall in 2011, there were 45 vessels hijacked, 176 vessels boarded, 113 vessels fired upon and 105 reported attempted attacks. A total of eight crew members were killed throughout the year, the same number as 2010," says the report.

According to the IMB, Somali pirates continue to account for the majority of attacks – approximately 54%. "But while the overall number of Somali incidents increased from 219 in 2010 to 237 in 2011, the number of successful hijackings decreased from 49 to 28."

The overall figures for Somali piracy could have been much higher if it were not for the continued efforts of international naval forces, IMB reports validating the NATO strategist's view. In the last quarter of 2011 alone, pre-emptive strikes by international navies disrupted at least 20 Pirate Action Groups (PAGs) before they could become a threat to commercial fleets. The last quarter of 2010 saw 90 incidents and 19 vessels hijacked; in 2011, those numbers fell to 31 and four, respectively.

“These pre-emptive naval strikes, the hardening of vessels in line with the Best Management Practices (BMP) and the deterrent effect of Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP), have all contributed to this decrease,” said Captain Pottengal Mukundan, Director of the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB PRC), which has been monitoring piracy worldwide since 1991. "The role of the navies is critical to the anti-piracy efforts in this area."

Although the number of vessels employing and reporting the carriage of PCASP increased in 2011, the regulation and vetting of PCASP still needs to be adequately addressed, Captain Mukundan warned. Until such time as a comprehensive legal framework is in place, owners and Masters should follow the International Maritime Organization and industry guidelines on the carriage of PCASP.

The IMB report shows that Somali pirate attacks were predominantly concentrated within the cross roads of the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden. However, 2011 marked the first hijacking by Somali pirates of an anchored vessel from within the territorial waters of a foreign State – namely, Oman – highlighting the need for ports and vessels at anchorages in the region to be vigilant.

Elsewhere, Nigeria and Benin continued to be piracy hotspots, according to the report. While 10 attacks were reported in Nigeria, including two hijackings, IMB warns that this number is not representative of the real threat of Nigeria piracy. Underreporting of attacks in Nigeria continues to be a cause for concern, and IMB states that it is aware of at least another 34 unreported incidents in Nigerian waters.

Also in 2011 a probable extension of Nigerian piracy into neighbouring Benin included 20 incidents against tankers, eight of which were hijacked and had cargoes partly stolen. Although the average length of captivity for ships taken off the coasts of Nigeria and Benin tends to be roughly 10 days, compared to six months in Somali hijackings, IMB warns that these attacks can be more violent.
Farmers Divided Over 'Green Economy'

By Eva Weiler

ROME - Representatives of farmers and rural producers from around the world feel far from comfortable with the ramifications of a "green economy" focus that they fear could turn ecosystem services and biodiversity into economic "goods" to be traded and speculated upon in open markets.

They disapprove of government focus on investment in urban infrastructure, despite the fact that a majority of people live in rural areas. Lack of reliable land tenure and insecure access to natural resources were mentioned as persisting obstacles to smallholder, family farming and indigenous peoples' wellbeing.

This emerged from discussions at the Fourth Global Meeting of the Farmers' Forum at the Rome headquarters of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on February 21.

Their reservations are grounded on the 'zero' draft outcome document of the Rio+20 conference from June 20 to 22 in Brazil to commemorate the historic Earth Summit twenty years ago, which does not put a square focus on smallholders. In fact paras 64-66 of the Food Security section state:

"64. We reaffirm the right to food and call upon all States to prioritize sustainable intensification of food production through increased investment in local food production, improved access to local and global agri-food markets, and reduced waste throughout the supply chain, with special attention to women, smallholders, youth, and indigenous farmers. We are committed to ensuring proper nutrition for our people.

"65. We call for more transparent and open trading systems and, where appropriate, practices that contribute to the stability of food prices and domestic markets; ensure access to land, water and other resources; and support social protection programmes.

"66. We further support initiatives at all levels that improve access to information, enhance interactions among farmers and experts through education and extension services, and increase the use of appropriate technologies for sustainable agriculture."

On the positive side, however, the farmers' organizations attending the Forum felt that if they are strategic and coherent in their approach, Rio+20 could be an opportunity to make progress on these frustrating points.

The associations generally expressed appreciation for the Rome-based agencies’ – including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – joint submission to the zero draft document as well as to the Farmer's Major Group submission. There was optimism that if consensus can be reached on how to engage in the process and exactly what the outcome objective should be, important progress for the rural poor was not out of reach.

"One key hurdle to overcome will be connecting farmers organizations worldwide to enable their collective voice to be heard leading up to and at Rio+20," noted an informed observer. "The associations may request IFAD to support their efforts to organize and navigate the dizzying mix of events and procedures."

IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized UN agency based in Rome – the United Nations’ food and agricultural hub. It is a unique partnership of 167 members from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), other developing countries and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Coming from the floodplains, hillsides and dry lands of the different regions where IFAD operates, attendees represented the voices of millions of smallholders, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers who face serious climate-change challenges every day. The Forum took place in conjunction with IFAD's annual meeting, the 35th Governing Council, and focused on the links between overcoming poverty and food insecurity, and improving sustainable agriculture development.

"The sea is empty, which means that our nets and our plates are empty as well," said Herman Kumara Wijethunge, General Secretary of the National Fisheries Solidarity Movement and the World Forum of Fisher People at the opening of the meeting. He further emphasized that institutions like IFAD help facilitate policy dialogues and that the Farmers' Forum is a key vehicle to attract attention to the needs of fishers. All 92 farmer leaders attending the Forum agreed on the need to jointly address the global challenges of food insecurity and climate change.

Partnerships

"Partnerships are central to IFAD’s work," said IFAD’s President, Kanayo F. Nwanze. “And farmers from developing countries are our most important partner of all. They are the experts and the agents of change in ensuring enough food for an ever-growing population. We need them and their knowledge to do our job – to help grow more food and increase the resilience of smallholder farmers worldwide who currently feed one-third of the global population."

Since 1978, IFAD has invested about US$13.7 billion in grants and low-interest loans to developing countries through projects empowering about 405 million people to break out of poverty, thereby helping to create vibrant rural communities.
Smallholder farmers in developing countries suffer most from the changes in climate patterns and the degradation of natural resources. They live and earn their livelihoods in the most ecologically and climatically vulnerable landscapes, relying on weather-dependent natural resources. Increasing volatile and uncertain weather patterns, water scarcity, soil erosion, declining soil fertility and salinization of arable land are all undermining agricultural production in many parts of the developing world.

"Solutions to climate-related challenges and the enhancement of environmental sustainability is not only a question of technology, but also one of the right policies," said Jean-Philippe Audinet, who leads IFAD’s work with the Farmers’ Forum. "Farmers’ organizations play a central role in representing smallholders in policy dialogues to ensure that policies respond to their needs and realities."

The Farmers’ Forum was initiated in 2005, with the first meeting taking place in 2006, to institutionalize the continuous dialogue between smallholders and rural producers, IFAD and governments of its Member States.

IFAD President Nwanze on Februrary 22 committed to pull up to 90 million people out of poverty. "The time has come for smallholders to play their rightful role in contributing to economic growth and food security," Nwanze told a gathering of world leaders, international policymakers, farmer representatives and government ministers.

"When these farmers are recognized as small entrepreneurs, when they have access to better resources and incentives, and when they have access to markets and an enabling environment, they can transform their communities, their own lives, and indeed the world," he said.

In the light of the world population projected to be more than 9 billion in 2050, Nwanze called for "perseverance, patience and determination to reduce rural poverty and create climate-smart ways for smallholders to build their resilience."

Specifically emphasizing IFAD’s Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme, Nwanze added that the Fund has a critical role to play helping smallholders adapt to a changing climate while also reducing emissions and safeguarding the natural resource base.

Nwanze highlighted the importance of women, who shoulder a heavy workload in rural areas. IFAD has long recognized that there will be no substantial progress in poverty reduction unless there is greater investment in women, one half of humanity.

And with more than half of the rural population in developing countries between the ages of 15 and 25, Nwanze challenged leaders of the developing world, to work in partnership with IFAD to "harness youth’s tremendous energy and provide opportunities for them, particularly in rural areas."

"We will need the young people of today to be the farmers of tomorrow," he added.

Since taking office in 2009, Nwanze has overseen a change and reform agenda which has improved IFAD's efficiency with projects being implemented more quickly, with less delay between approval and first disbursement.

Nwanze, who has led IFAD’s increased presence in the countries where it works, said the Fund will reach more people and strengthen collaboration with its additional country presence. In addition, Nwanze pledged to expand partnerships with the private sector to make, "smallholder farmers more visible business partners in their efforts to feed the world."

He applauded Member States for their commitment to IFAD's Ninth replenishment of resources of US$1.5 billion in new contributions to finance agriculture and rural development projects across the developing world. This represents a 25 per cent increase over IFAD's Eighth Replenishment.

Kanayo F. Nwanze began his term as IFAD’s fifth President on 1 April 2009. A Nigerian national, Nwanze has a strong record as an advocate and leader of change and a keen understanding of the complexity of development issues. He served as IFAD’s Vice-President for two years before taking the organization’s helm. Prior to that, he was Director-General of the Africa Rice Center for a decade, and instrumental in introducing and promoting New Rice for Africa (NERICA), a high-yield, drought- and pest-resistant rice variety developed specifically for the African landscape. He also transformed the Center from a West African association to an Africa-wide organization with an international reputation for excellence.
Blue Economy Can Protect Mediterranean Sea

By Richard Johnson

PARIS - Twenty-two Mediterranean countries and the European Union expect the forthcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil to adopt a strategic policy framework supporting a "blue" economy to safeguard and promote a clean and healthy environment.

The call came in a closing communique – the Paris Declaration – as the 17th Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP17) to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols drew to an end after three days of talks in the French capital on February 10.

The Barcelona Convention entered into force in 1978, after Mediterranean countries and the European Community had, three years earlier, adopted the Mediterranean Action Plan, the first-ever Regional Seas Programme under the umbrella of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The convention was amended and renamed in 1995; and that version came into force in 2004.

The 22 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention are: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, the European Union, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

In his opening speech, France’s Ambassador for the Environment, Jean-Pierre Thébault, who chaired the meeting, said: "In this very symbolic year for the environment, I express the wish that the Mediterranean Action Plan remains ambitious and leads by example, showing the way towards Rio+20."

Paris Declaration

The Paris Declaration reflects this ambition: The 22 countries want a "blue" economy, a version of the Green Economy that is applied to seas and oceans, and hope to see a strategic policy framework adopted at Rio+20 in Brazil in June.

The profound significance of the call for the "blue" economy is underlined by the fact that the world’s marine ecosystems provide essential food and livelihoods to millions of people. UNEP’s research shows how a switch to the more sustainable Green Economy model could unlock the vast potential of the marine-based economy and at the same time significantly reduce ocean degradation while alleviating poverty. UNEP defines the Green Economy as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.
"The time has come for us to rethink how we manage our oceans," said Achim Steiner, executive Director of UNEP and Under Secretary General of the UN. "They are a key pillar for many countries of their economic and social development, and are vital in the fight against poverty. But too many of these essential natural resources are being degraded by unsustainable use, putting the ecosystems services they provide, such as food security and climate regulations for instance, at risk."

Steiner added; "Management decisions and investments that put the well-being of the oceans are essential if we are to continue to profit from this rich natural resource. A 'blue' economy in the Mediterranean and elsewhere would be a big step on the right path."

UNEP is the voice for the environment in the UN system. Established in 1972, UNEP’s mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

UNEP hosts the Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan of the Barcelona Convention.

The Paris meeting welcomed the progress that had been made in 2011 in reinforcing the fight against deterioration of the Mediterranean sea with the entry into force of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) protocol and the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution resulting from Exploration and Exploitation of the Continental Shelf and the Seabed and its Subsoil (the "Offshore" Protocol).

These two-world first protocols recognize the Mediterranean environment as an critical and shared resource, and promote and promote a co-operative and holistic approach to its management.

In the Paris Declaration, the Contracting Parties also:
- Reaffirmed their political commitment to the sustainable development of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastal zones through an ecosystem approach to the management of human activities.
- Agreed to develop a coherent, well-managed network of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean, aiming for a target of 10 per cent of marine protected areas by 2020.
- Decided to intensify their efforts to curb marine pollution from land-based sources, such as mercury, Persistent Organic Pollutants and marine litter, by adopting legally binding measures, and reduce pollution from offshore and marine-based activities though regional action plans.
- Adopted the action plan for the implementation of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Protocol, and encouraged all Contracting Parties to ratify it.
- Agreed to work to protect the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction through the implementation of existing instruments and through the development of a multilateral agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- Supported the preparation by 2014 of a report on the state of the marine environment, including from a socioeconomic perspective.

Boosting marine sector

UNEP said in a report released on January 25, 2012: The economic productivity of the marine sector can be significantly boosted by shifting to a more sustainable approach that focuses on green activities such as renewable energy, eco-tourism and sustainable transport.

The UNEP report ‘Green Economy in a Blue World’ looks at six different economic areas in the marine sector and provides recommendations on how to boost their potential by implementing green measures.

"Oceans are a key pillar for many countries in their development and fight to tackle poverty, but the wide range of ecosystem services, including food security and climate regulation, provided by marine and coastal environments are today under unprecedented pressure," said UNEP Executive Director Steiner releasing the report.

"Stepping up green investments in marine and coastal resources and enhancing international cooperation in managing these transboundary ecosystems are essential if a transition to low-carbon, resource-efficient green economy is to be realized," he said.

The six economic areas examined by the report include fisheries and aquaculture, marine transport, ocean nutrient pollution, marine-based renewable energy, coastal tourism, and deep-sea minerals.

"This report provides concrete examples of how emerging ocean industries – including ocean energy and aquaculture industries – can become more profitable, more sustainable, and meet the needs of a growing population without sacrificing the health of our fragile ocean ecosystems," said Linwood Pendleton, one of the contributors to the report and Director of Ocean and Coastal Policy at the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions.

The report also examines how small island developing States (SIDS), such as those in the Asia-Pacific and Caribbean regions, can take advantage of green economy opportunities to reduce their vulnerability to climate change and promote sustainable growth.

The report seeks to stimulate countries to take action as they prepare for Rio+20, according to a news release issued by UNEP.

"In the run-up to Rio+20, this report shows that a shift to a green economy can, if comprehensively implemented, unlock the potential of marine ecosystems to fuel economic growth – particularly in small island developing States but in ways that ensure that future generations derive an equitable share of marine resources and services," Steiner.

The report was produced by UNEP in collaboration with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the WorldFish Center and GRID-Arendal."
UN To Grant 'Land for Life Award' At Rio+20

By Jutta Wolf

BERLIN - Ahead of an international conference to commemorate the historic Earth Summit twenty years ago, the United Nations will grant a 'Land for Life Award' to honour initiatives aimed at sustainable land development. The conference known as Rio+20 is being held in the historic Brazilian city from June 20 to 22.

The Bonn-based secretariat of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has invited applications for the award, which will be granted on the World Day to Combat Desertification observed every year on June 17 around the world.

"The award will go to inspiring initiatives which secure the health and productivity of soil for the well-being of present and future generations," said the UNCCD secretariat, adding: "The prize will be awarded to those efforts which reduce land degradation through sustainable land management, or are outstanding examples of political leadership, policy, business, advocacy campaigns or scientific research."

The (Land for Life Award) Jury particularly welcomes nominations of candidates whose work is: "innovative, collaborative, achieved in partnership across sectors, supports free knowledge sharing and capacity building, empowers vulnerable and marginalized groups, and fosters gender equality, cultural diversity and social inclusion."

The Award Jury is hoping to receive nominations from individuals, institutions, non-governmental organizations and civil society, private sector, academic and research organizations, policy makers as well as journalists and media.

The Land for Life award is motivated by the fact that every minute, land equivalent to the size of a football field becomes unproductive, lost to degradation through desertification and drought. At the same time, world population is growing rapidly, estimated to reach 9 billion by 2050.

"There are only two options to meet the needs of future generations: to further cut down forests, or to make degraded land productive. Solutions for restoring degraded lands already exist: communities, scientists, policy makers and others are already at work, but their efforts are under appreciated, and therefore, underutilized," notes the UNCCD secretariat.

The consequences of land degradation can indeed be severe, and people in the drylands are particularly vulnerable. It is estimated that more than half of land used for agriculture is moderately or severely affected by soil degradation. Without productive land, people face hunger and poverty. Struggles for resources lead to conflict, and people are forced to leave their homes, searching for better lives as economic migrants and environmental refugees.

What is worse, land degradation does not only occur in the drylands. It can happen anywhere in the world and is often caused by human activities such as over-cultivation, deforestation, and poorly planned irrigation systems. When land is degraded, it emits more greenhouse gases and in turn worsens climate change.

But land degradation is not God given and does not have to be permanent. Recent studies show that up to two billion hectares of degraded land and forest globally have the potential for restoration. There are many ways to restore degraded land, such as through enriching soil, planting trees and diversifying crop and animal production. Restoring degraded lands can also offer solutions to climate change, as healthy soils and vegetation store more carbon.

Studies point out that there are many benefits to sustainable land management, which can simultaneously conserve natural resources and increase yields. These benefits can include:

- Increased crop yields and food security
- Local access to sustainable fuel and energy sources
- Clean water
- Increased vegetation cover preventing erosion
- Preservation of soil moisture, enabling soil development and mitigating degradation
- Optimised water, nutrient, carbon and biomass cycle
- Preservation of biodiversity at the farm level through agroforestry, intercropping and locally adapted seed
- Reconstituting carbon pools in soil and vegetation cover resulting in less carbon emissions
- Reducing floods through regulation of river, lake and groundwater levels
- Protection of cultural heritage and natural landscapes through promoting practices that utilize indigenous knowledge.

Convinced that everyone can make a difference, from ordinary individuals and farmers to political leaders, businesses, scientists and media, the UNCCD had decided to grant the award. Through sustainable land management, dry and degraded land can become an asset. Besides, there are many ways to support sustainable land management through policy, innovation, changing agricultural practices and education and awareness raising. ☞
Preparations Move Ahead For Rio+20 Summit

By Richard Johnson

GENEVA - A significant step in preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro was taken as delegates from UN agencies, member states and various civil society organisations concluded three days of deliberations on the draft outcome document.

"It is encouraging that the zero draft is viewed as a starting point for negotiations," said Sha Zukang, the Secretary-General of the conference popularly known as Rio+20, at the end of the discussions at UN Headquarters in New York.

"We will need to keep up a brisk pace if we are to complete negotiations in a timely manner. We must present to the world leaders and, indeed, to the world's people, an outcome that will make a difference in our shared undertaking to achieve a sustainable future – a future we all want," said Sha at the conclusion of three-day negotiations on January 27.

This informal round was the first of four more negotiating sessions to be held in March, April/May and June in the lead-up to Rio+20 from June 20 to 22, 2012.

Sha said that governments must make the draft ambitious and action-oriented, as many of them had emphasized, and ensure accountability. "We must not go home from Rio and forget our commitments the next day," he said, adding that a mechanism to ensure genuine delivery of commitments must be spelt out in the outcome document. He called for "decisions that show the world we mean business, but not business as usual."

The 'zero draft' for the outcome document of Rio+20, made public on January 10, was condensed from more than 6,000 pages of submissions from member states, international organizations and civil society groups in an open, transparent and inclusive process spanning months.

It underlines that 20 years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, where countries adopted Agenda 21, the UN is again bringing together governments, international institutions and major groups to agree on a range of smart measures that can reduce poverty. And this while promoting decent jobs, clean energy and a more sustainable and fair use of resources, says the UN Department of Public Information in a special brochure.

Agenda 21 was a blueprint to rethink economic growth, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection. It stipulated that industrialised North will be a role model for the developing South.

Sha presented for Rio+20 a short list of "must haves" based on the three days of comments and suggestions. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), he said, could be one of the important contributions of Rio+20. At the very least, by 2015, SDGs should be defined with a clear timeframe and give clear direction to building green economies appropriate to national circumstances.

With an eye on the Rio summit, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on January 30 for action on a new blueprint for creating a sustainable planet, a just society and a growing economy, stressing that the current path will not lead to a fair and resilient future for the world’s people.

"We need to chart a new, more sustainable course for the future, one that strengthens equality and economic growth while protecting our planet," he stated. "Sustainable development offers our best chance to change course." ☞

☞ Continued from page 18

The importance of the UNCCD is underlined by the fact that more than one billion people inhabiting drylands in some 100 countries are caught in the pangs of poverty and excruciating hunger.

Every minute, 23 hectares of land are degraded through drought and desertification, eating into the economic, social and environmental pillars of our sustainable development. Drylands comprise one-third of the world land mass and population, 44% of the global food production system, and 50% of the world’s livestock. In addition, dry forests are home to the world’s largest diversity of mammals whose survival, literally, hangs on the arid zone forests.

UNCCD’s Mohamadou Mansour N’Diaye told IDN in a recent interview that it hopes the Rio+20 conference will take “bold actions towards setting ambitious but attainable targets” that include a "global Zero Net Rate of Land Degradation."

UNCCD is one of the three conventions emerging from the Earth Summit in June 1992. Since then, land degradation has escalated, drought cycles have spread to virtually all parts of the world, not just some ecosystems (arid, semi-arid and dry sub humid areas) already identified, said N’Diaye.

"The actions to be implemented thus become global. 40% of the terrestrial ecosystems are concerned and some 2 billion people are faced with multiple challenges relating to DLDD (desertification, land degradation and drought)," he added.

At the Rio Summit, which will also mark the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, N’Diaye said, “we call on the world leaders to further express their resolve to address DLDD worldwide through taking bold actions towards setting ambitious but attainable targets that include a ‘global Zero Net Rate of Land Degradation’.”

Setting such a target would be instrumental in the sense that it would open possibilities to assess the global status of desertification and land degradation on a scientific basis, he added. ☐
The 22-member panel, established by the Secretary-General in August 2010 to formulate a new blueprint for sustainable development and low-carbon prosperity, was co-chaired by Finnish President Tarja Halonen and South African President Jacob Zuma.

The group’s final report, ‘Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing,’ contains 56 recommendations to put sustainable development into practice and to make it a part of mainstream economic policy as quickly as possible.

“Today our planet and our world are experiencing the best of times, and the worst of times,” states the report. “The world is experiencing unprecedented prosperity, while the planet is under unprecedented stress.”

It adds that because of the array of overlapping challenges the world faces, it is more urgent than ever to take action to embrace the principles of the sustainable development agenda. "It is time that genuine global action is taken to enable people, markets and governments to make sustainable choices."

The report calls for integrating social and environmental costs in how the world prices and measures economic activities. It also calls for a set of sustainable development indicators that go beyond the traditional approach of gross domestic product (GDP) and recommends that governments develop and apply a set of Sustainable Development Goals that can mobilize global action and help monitor progress.

It underscores the importance of science as an essential guide for decision-making on sustainability issues. It calls on the Secretary-General to lead efforts to produce a regular Global Sustainable Development Outlook report that integrates knowledge across sectors and institutions, and to consider creating a science advisory board or scientific adviser.

“The need to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development so as to achieve sustainability was clearly defined a quarter of a century ago. It is time to make it happen,” states the report.

“The opportunities for change are vast. We are not passive, helpless victims of the impersonal, determinist forces of history. And the exciting thing is that we can choose our future.”

The report serves as an important contribution to the UN’s work on sustainable development, particularly in preparation for Rio+20.

President of the General Assembly Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, who has made sustainable development a cornerstone of his work, said on January 31 that reform of environmental institutions is needed so countries can achieve sustainable development. He stressed that States must prepare and contribute to this reform ahead of Rio+20 in June.

“Realities on the ground show that sustainable development depends on an effective framework of institutions and decision-making processes at local, national, regional and global levels, working together. Yet international environmental governance is, at present, in need of more consolidation,” said Al Nasser at the conference entitled ‘Towards new global governance for the environment’ in Paris.

Al-Nasser stressed the need for new innovative mechanisms to ensure that existing environmental mandates are well-coordinated and efficient, and underlined the opportunity that Rio+20 presents to work on this aspect.

“From our preparations to date, one single message emerges: the Rio+20 outcome will need to give birth to a strong institutional architecture. An architecture that promotes a better integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental protection – and addresses new and emerging issues,” he said.

Al-Nasser highlighted at the conference several preparation activities that have already made recommendations for environmental reform including those made by the Rio+20 initial draft, ‘The Future we Want,’ which was the result of three days of deliberations concluded January 27.

He also reiterated his support for member states in this particular issue. "It is my intention to support Member States in achieving ambitious reform of the UN’s environmental governance structure,” he said.

"There is no doubt that the success of our efforts will require longer-term vision, as well as the genuine willingness of Members States to preserve our planet for future generations to enjoy in dignity,” he added.

Earlier in an interview with IDN’s magazine for international cooperation, Global Perspectives, Al-Nasser said: "In all my meetings with world leaders, ministers and other high officials I continue to urge them to do more for 'Sustainable Development and Global Prosperity' which is one the four areas of special focus of my Presidency. This is why the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June in Brazil is very important. It can surely give an extra push to efforts towards the achievement of the MDGs and take the UN’s development agenda forward."
Non-Proliferation Through Fuel Cooperation

By Ulrich Kühn*

HAMBURG - Middle East: The year is 2022. A growing need for energy is putting strain on three major actors in the region. There is Muslim Brotherhood-ruled Egypt, democratic but turmoil-plagued post-Assad Syria, and the military junta reigning in Saudi Arabia. Back in 2012, these states had started to realign their national energy policies. The common goal was to add a nuclear component to the mix within the next decade. Their motivations range from the general need to foster sustainable growth and to satisfy the thirst for energy of fast growing populations, to specific desalination needs.

Although they have made a fortune via technology sales and the construction of nuclear power plants, the countries of the slowly declining First World voice growing concerns about the safety and security of nuclear facilities and materials in the region. Furthermore, these regional players have not excluded the option of uranium enrichment as part of their national fuel cycles. The possibility of mushrooming clandestine nuke programs puzzles western analysts. Non-proliferation is the chief concern of the first female U.S. President. Another case like Iran, which was stopped on the brink of acquiring a nuclear weapons capability, could cause havoc in the region.

Meanwhile, the League of Arab States criticizes western proliferation concerns as interference in their internal affairs. The civil use of nuclear energy is a right common to all signatories of the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), the League argues. Any move of the ‘West’ to infringe upon this right could lead key Middle Eastern states to withdraw from the NPT. 2022 could herald the end of the global non-proliferation regime.

The Future Has Already Begun

What reads like fiction is already becoming reality. The prolonged and increasingly heated debate about the Iranian nuclear program has diverted attention away from the fact that 14 states in the Middle East have announced plans to embark on civilian nuclear programs.

Egypt and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) announced the launch of civil nuclear programs as early as 2006. Analysts agree that Egypt’s motivation is largely economical and spurred on by a rapidly growing population and declining national oil production. Cairo invited tenders for the construction of its first nuclear plant in August 2010. Despite the Egyptian revolution, the envisioned Al Dabaa reactor could go on stream as early as 2022.

The rationale behind the GCC’s announcement is far more influenced by Saudi strategic deliberations than by structural market pressures in the Gulf States. As Saudi Prince Turki Al Faisal noted: “Iran’s ... ambition to acquire nuclear weapons has changed the strategic realities of the region.” Further statements by the Prince were rather more alarming: “What I suggest for Saudi Arabia and for the other Gulf states ... is that we must study carefully all the options, including the option of acquiring weapons of mass destruction.”

The unfolding race for nuclear energy in the region – be it economically or strategically rooted – becomes even more precarious in light of a lack of international control. Here is the good news: all states of the region, except Israel, adhere to the principles of the NPT regime and have signed and ratified a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

That’s as far as the good news goes. Only six countries of the region (Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Turkey, and UAE) have signed and ratified the more intrusive Additional Protocol of the UN watchdog. Seven states, including Egypt, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Syria stay away from the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Four more states lack membership to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, again with Egypt, Iran, and Syria missing.

The same applies to the Modified Small Quantities Protocol, this time with the positive exception of Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar. To hit rock bottom, as few as nine states are parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety and not a single one has signed and ratified the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management. Clearly, the region’s track record is poor when it comes to safety, verifiability and transparency.

Meanwhile America’s policy on the region is inconsistent. Washington guarantees the security of the Israeli State but is only lukewarm in its support for a zone free from Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in the Middle East. Economically the U.S. is dependent on the region’s oil, but its sanctions target Iran, the world’s third-largest oil producer. Capitol Hill lawmakers would like to see the Arab Spring achieve fruition, supported by sustained economic growth. At the same time the U.S. security community warns of the increasing dangers of a nuclear Middle East. Finally, Washington is committed to halting the Iranian nuclear program by all means necessary, but is unwilling to address the issue of Israel’s nuclear weapons.

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Beyond that, U.S.-led initiatives to counter proliferation such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Global Partnership, and the Nuclear Security Summits fall short of establishing a global norm. Washington’s strategy is largely bound to the rationale of ‘coalitions of the willing’ or otherwise exclusive clubs. Barack Obama’s "Global Zero" postulate has so far not changed U.S. policy.

An approach, capable of coping with the emerging economic challenges in the Middle East seems to be missing. What is worse, Washington’s unbalanced agenda could clash with the interests of its key allies Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey if those states were to go nuclear without opening their programs to established international regimes.

If Washington fails to find a consistent policy that can bridge its own non-proliferation concerns and the region’s economic demands, would international institutions then jump in and sort out the mess? The answer is a definite ‘maybe’.

The IAEA should be the optimal institution to tackle the problems described. However, diverging perceptions about the political independence of the IAEA have shed negative light on the organization’s credibility. In particular, the makeup of the Agency’s Board of Governors – which mainly consists of Western nuclear supplier states – raises doubts and questions about the Agency’s ability to act as an honest broker.

An additional multilateral option under UN auspices is the ongoing struggle to raise support for a 2012 conference on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Yet the main actors concerned have so far tended to dismiss the possibility of debating links between security and economic matters at this conference and would rather focus first and foremost on military aspects. What is more, the inequality of the United Nations’ system, which is particularly evident on nuclear issues, speaks against the UN as a trailblazer.

**Fresh Thinking**

What if America’s non-proliferation policy fails in the Middle East? What if international institutions are blocked from addressing the issue? And what if an increase in national nuclear programs leads to heightened insecurity in the region? Answering the region’s problems will require fresh thinking and an effort to involve the region’s emerging powers constructively. But first of all the region needs to develop an approach that is genuinely its own.

The core of a possible solution is a multinational nuclear fuel bank, located in the Middle East, in which all participating states are equal partners. Such a fuel bank could secure the supply of national power plants with low-enriched uranium (LEU).

Two major reasons speak in favor of such an arrangement. The first derives from the insight that a multinationalization makes great sense in economic and scientific terms. Opting for a cooperative approach would limit financial burdens. Instead of having each state strive for its own uranium-enrichment and spent fuel-reprocessing facilities, states could opt for voluntary self-restraint and dedicate these sensitive and costly processes to the (shared) responsibility of a regional agency. A restructured Arab Atomic Energy Agency could instead take on this task.

Long-term contracts, supplied by regional uranium ore producers (e.g. Jordan) would have to guarantee a non-discriminatory policy and should be stocked with mutual assurance mechanisms. Potential gains would include reduced spending, mutual accountability, and confidence through local ownership. Furthermore, attached laboratories and a potential ‘Middle East Nuclear Research Center’ could become a local hub for badly needed knowledge transfer to the region.

The second argument for multinational cooperation is reassurance. As Max Weber has put it “politics . . . means striving to share power”. But sharing power means also increased reassurance about the others’ capabilities. Almost no other region in the world is more characterized by suspicion and mistrust than the Middle East. A shared regional arrangement would therefore not inflame proliferation, since no state of the region would like to see one of its neighbors involved in shady nuclear activities.

From a purely technical point of view, by supplying states with LEU, the proliferation-relevant breakout potential of states would be diminished. To address the critical ‘back end’ of the fuel cycle, used fuel rods should stay under the agency’s authority. The secure transfer of spent nuclear fuel to storage and disposal facilities, together with the facilities’ safety, would be part of its portfolio. An equally transparent and rigorous bookkeeping system could serve as security in case of any reasonable suspicion of clandestine diversion. Participating states would also need to provide the agency with a mandate for intrusive verification, possibly including mutual on-site inspections.

One aspect still in need of clarification is a robust link to the international non-proliferation arena. The IAEA should be granted the right to monitor the agency’s most sensitive operations, namely uranium enrichment, reprocessing of spent fuel, and spent fuel disposal and storage.

**Start Regional, Go Global!**

Opting for a fully self-regulating regional approach would help to solve some of the most pressing quandaries of the Middle East. On top of that, a successful energy initiative could ultimately serve as a model for other conflict-ridden regions.

Regional nuclear cooperation has already achieved some remarkable results. The European EURATOM model brought together erstwhile war parties Germany and France as early as 1957. Further lessons can be drawn from South America, where regional power Brazil shares a binational nuclear agency with its former adversary Argentina. In Southeast Asia, a future regional system could help overcome tensions on the Korean peninsula, perhaps including China and Japan as guarantors of regional stability. A cooperative solution to the India–Pakistan divide – though hard to imagine right now – is even conceivable in the long run.

The world’s nascent economic powerhouses cannot wait for the system of international institutions to change. If a global regulation mechanism is missing, the regions, and their emerging powers, have to develop their own instruments. Though, in the case of the Middle East, this might mean acknowledging Iran as an emerging power.
SANE Act to Cut U.S. Nukes Budget

By Jamshed Baruah

If you are 'sane', you are mentally sound. U.S. Congressman Edward J. Markey has lent a new dimension to that word by introducing the Smarter Approach to Nuclear Expenditures (SANE) Act of 2012 that cuts $100 billion over the next decade on outdated nuclear weapons programmes.

Markey, who is Co-President of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND), took to the House floor on February 8, 2012 to decry the wasteful spending in America's nuclear weapons programmes. SANE has 34 co-sponsors.

"It is insane that Republicans are proposing to block the automatic defense cuts mandated by the debt deal while America’s nuclear weapons budget teems with billions in wasteful spending," said Markey, senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and founder of the Bipartisan Nonproliferation Task Force.

"It is insane to spend hundreds of billions on new nuclear bombs and delivery systems to fight a long-past Cold War while ignoring our 21st century security needs and seeking to cut Medicare, Medicaid and social programs that millions of Americans depend on. The SANE Act will cut spending on outdated, wasteful nuclear weapons and related programs over the next ten years and will strengthen our long-term economic and national security," Markey said.

The Smarter Approach to Nuclear Expenditures (SANE) Act of 2012 will in particular:
- Cut the current fleet of nuclear submarines from 12 operational at sea to eight operational at sea, saving $3 billion
- Delay the purchase of new nuclear submarines saving $17 billion
- Reduce the number of ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles), typically designed for launching nukes, saving $6 billion
- End the nuclear missions of air bombers saving up to $17 billion
- Delay new bomber program saving $18 billion
- Cancel new, wasteful nuclear weapons facilities saving $15 billion

The legislation enacts a call made by Markey and 65 other US legislators in October 2011 for the U.S. Super Committee, to cut $20 billion per annum ($200 billion over 10 years) from the nuclear weapons budget in order to preserve funding for vital programs for social security and the economy (See Freeze the Nukes: Fund the Future).

"Although the SANE Act only asks for half as much to be cut, it goes into detail on which nuclear programs could be cut without impacting on current nuclear policies or doctrines. Even greater cuts could be made if the US negotiates additional nuclear disarmament agreements during this period," says Alyn Ware, Global Coordinator of (PNND) is a global network of over 800 parliamentarians from more than 80 countries working to prevent nuclear proliferation and achieve nuclear disarmament.

"It's well past time to realign our nation's nuclear arsenal to deal with today's threats," said Joseph Cirincione, President of Ploughshares Fund. "The current Cold War nuclear weapons complex is draining resources and attention from the military programs our nation needs to meet current and future challenges. It is encouraging to see the leadership of so many members of Congress helping to move our nation toward a smarter national security strategy. Congressman Markey and the other co-sponsors of the SANE Act are doing a great service, promoting a much needed debate on how to modernize our nuclear force in a way that both saves money and makes our nation safer."

Ploughshares Fund was founded in 1981 by San Francisco philanthropist, artist and activist Sally Lilienthal (1919-2006). Under Sally’s guidance, Ploughshares Fund made grants whose impact far exceeded their size.

"We are well past the time when the United States needs to stop pouring billions of additional dollars into maintaining the existing nuclear weapons arsenal that is immoral, that the U.S. doesn't need and that is not making our country safer," said David Culp, Legislative Representative, Friends Committee on National Legislation.

"POGO is enthusiastic that so many of our recommendations were included in the bill. We also hope there will be bipartisan support for aspects of the proposal, since the cuts aren’t partisan and are a good start to spending smarter and ending the old Cold War strategy," said Danielle Brian, Executive Director, Project On Government Oversight (POGO). "We thank Representative Markey and the other cosponsors for their leadership on this critical issue."

POGO is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that champions good government reforms. POGO's investigations into corruption, misconduct, and conflicts of interest achieve a more effective, accountable, open, and ethical federal government. Founded in 1981, POGO (which was then known as Project on Military Procurement) originally worked to expose outrageously overpriced military spending on items such as a $7,600 coffee maker and a $436 hammer. In 1990, after many successes reforming military spending, including a Pentagon spending freeze at the height of the Cold War, POGO decided to expand its mandate and investigate waste, fraud, and abuse throughout the federal government.
NUKE ABOLITION

Security Benefits of Nuclear Abolition to USA

By Frederick N. Mattis*

ANNAPOLIS, USA - The alarm over the Iranian nuclear program calls for reflection on the ultimate cause of all nuclear weapons-related threats: the absence of a worldwide ban on nuclear weapons.

Focusing on the USA, below are security benefits of nuclear abolition – with axioms being that all states have joined a treaty banning nuclear weapons before it enters into force, and that worldwide inspection (verification) applies, and that before signing the nuclear ban treaty, states must fully join the current chem-bio weapons bans: 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

First, the USA would no longer face the threat of terrorist acquisition of a nuclear weapon from a state's arsenal. A terrorist nuclear detonation would be catastrophic beyond measure; but under nuclear abolition, terrorists would no longer have possible access, by theft or other means, to nuclear warheads of any state.

The other current avenue for terrorists to attain a nuclear weapon would be to obtain, by theft or other means, about 100 pounds of uranium already enriched to nearly 90 percent isotope uranium-235, and then to fabricate a relatively simple "gun-type" nuclear weapon. (The actual enrichment of uranium by terrorists for such a weapon would in extreme probability be beyond their scope, even if aided by rogue scientists and technicians.)

However, this possible means of terrorist nuclear attainment can also be cut off – if a worldwide nuclear weapons ban requires cessation of highly-enriched uranium [HEU] use (i.e., in some naval and research and isotope production reactors), and requires blending-down of HEU stocks to non-weapons usable low-enriched uranium.

Under a fully enacted nuclear weapons ban, there would likely still exist substantial stocks of plutonium, which is also usable for nuclear weapons. However, that would not open up worrisome danger of terrorists attaining a nuclear weapon even if they somehow acquired plutonium, because the complex engineering of an "implosion" weapon – which is required when using plutonium due to its level of neutron emission – is beyond the realistically conceived personnel and technological resources of even well-financed terrorists. (Plutonium could be used for a radiological or "dirty" bomb, but this would not be a true nuclear, i.e., fission explosion.)

To summarize on nuclear terrorism and the USA: only the worldwide elimination and prohibition of nuclear weapons, with stipulation also of blending-down of HEU to low-enriched uranium, will free the USA from the current terrorist dangers of acquisition of a nuclear weapon from a state's arsenal, or acquisition of HEU to fabricate a relatively simple gun-type weapon. ("Simple" does not imply lack of destructive power; the Hiroshima-weapon was of this design, so-named because masses of HEU are slammed together to form a supercritical mass in a container resembling a gun barrel.)

Second nuclear-abolition security benefit to the USA is that it would be freed from the threat of possible nuclear strike by a fanatic or deranged regime or leader of a state. With no nuclear weapons, none could be launched due to influence of madness or fervor (or vengeance or desperation).

Third, the possibility of "false-alarm" nuclear missile launch against the USA would finally vanish. The current danger to the USA, of course, is primarily related to the hundreds of U.S. and Russian warheads still on high-alert status – although many fewer than Cold War heights. In 1995 the U.S. launch of a research rocket was communicated in advance to Russia, but word never reached necessary channels and President Boris Yeltsin came within minutes of activating a Russian nuclear response. Systems and humans can have failures; but under elimination of nuclear weapons the people of the USA (and Russia) would be freed from the possibility of "false-alarm" nuclear missile launch.

Fourth, particular U.S. foreign policy headaches, and potential concomitant disasters, would be obviated with a worldwide nuclear weapons ban. Pre-eminently, Iran would cease to pose a credible threat to attain nuclear weapons, this because Iran and all states would be under the unprecedented geopolitical, legal, psychological, and moral force of a nuclear abolition treaty that regards states equally and thus fairly, and relieves all states and people of current nuclear threats, and applies worldwide inspection/verification. (Iran, for its part, has long vocalized support for worldwide nuclear elimination while criticizing current arsenals of nuclear weapon states.) Further, the foreseeable certainty of international storms of opposition and obloquy against a pernicious violator of the treaty would be a high-wall deterrent to any inclination to its violation – especially so given that the treaty was joined by all states before its entry into force.

Fifth, any chemical or biological weapon threats from states against the USA would be diminished, likely to near-zero, with the geopolitical and other force of aforementioned (recommended) nuclear ban-required accession by states to the current chem-bio bans prior to signing a nuclear weapons ban. (Most countries, including the USA and Russia, are already parties to the CWC and BWC.)

In addition, the then-fully worldwide reach of the CWC and BWC would reduce the potential terrorist chem-bio threat against the USA, due to CWC/BWC strictures on amount and variety of chem-bio weapons-usable agents, plus no states having "weaponized" chem-bio agents that could possibly be obtained by terrorists.

Today's "weapons of mass destruction" threats, particularly nuclear, to the security of the USA and its people will persist at an unacceptably high level until the weapons are banned worldwide. Understandably, though, the USA and certain other countries most likely will insist that a nuclear abolition treaty only enter into force after it is unanimously joined. The mere introduction of such a treaty for states' signatures will bring to the forefront the authentic security benefits of nuclear abolition to all states.

Respect Dignity of Life, Convoke Nuke Abolition Summit

By Ramesh Jaura

In a variation of the legendary slogan "make love, not war", an eminent Buddhist philosopher is calling for a nuclear-free world in which genuine human security, sustainable development and unwavering respect for the dignity of life do not only comprise an ideal but constitute an entrenched reality.

In a 23-page 'peace proposal,' titled 'Human Security and Sustainability: Sharing Reverence for the Dignity of Life,' Buddhist leader Daisaku Ikeda pleads for a nuclear abolition summit in 2015 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of the two cities so that the growing momentum toward elimination of nuclear weapons becomes irreversible.

2015 will also be the year of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, and Ikeda expects such a summit to bring home to world leaders the terrible destructive capacity of nuclear weapons and so help ensure the necessary action toward their abolition.

Along with nuclear weapons, natural disasters and environmental degradation as well as poverty "present future generations with threats and burdens that will only become greater the more we delay," says Ikeda in his peace proposal, which is the thirtieth since 1983 on January 26, the day that the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was founded eight years earlier.

The 2012 peace proposal coincides with the fifty-fifth anniversary of the declaration issued by Ikeda's mentor and second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900-1958) calling for the prohibition of nuclear weapons. This declaration had as its background the increasingly fierce competition among nuclear-weapons states to develop ever larger and more powerful nuclear weapons.

Toda stated, "Although a movement calling for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons has arisen around the world, it is my wish to go further, to attack the problem at its root. I want to expose and rip out the claws that lie hidden in the very depths of such weapons."

As an eminent global citizen and a staunch civil society protagonist Roberto Savio says, the SGI president's peace proposal is "a fascinating document which joins vision with analysis, goals with reality, and strategy with knowledge."

It comes at a point in time when international attention tends to focus on the forthcoming presidential elections in the U.S., Russia and France, and change in government in China but very little on an international conference on the Middle East in order to turn the region into a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. The launch of such a conference was decided at the May 3-28, 2010 NPT Review conference in New York.

The year that marked the launch of Ikeda's first peace proposal, was characterised by nuclear deterrence which threatened to trigger what U.S. President Ronald Reagan termed 'star wars'. These were packaged as "a long-term research and development program to begin to achieve our ultimate goal of eliminating the threat posed by strategic nuclear missiles" and "pave the way for arms control measures to eliminate the weapons themselves".

Viewed from a benevolent perspective, Reagan's approach came close to Machiavellian 'the end justifies the means' dictum. This kind of philosophy is however rejected by Ikeda who, inspired by his unrelenting commitment to the antinuclear movement since the late 1950s, has been campaigning for a nuclear weapons free world.

Picture: www.daisakuikeda.org
Good Prospects for NWC

"For years, the SGI has promoted a movement to manifest the will of the world's people for the outlawing of nuclear weapons through the adoption of a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC). There are numerous signs that we are now positioned at a tipping point where a 'cascade' of governments start supporting adoption of an NWC," writes Ikeda.

Encouraging signs in his view are:
- The civil society initiative to draft a model NWC in 1997 has been followed up by a revised draft issued in 2007, demonstrating that the process of reviewing the legal measures necessary to achieve the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons is well under way.
- Since 1996, Malaysia and other countries have annually proposed a UN General Assembly resolution calling for the start of negotiations on an NWC. Support for this resolution has continued to grow; last year (2011) 130 member states supported it, including China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Iran.
- In 2008, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proposed negotiations on an NWC or a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments.
- The 2010 NPT Review Conference noted this proposal in the final outcome document that it adopted with the unanimous consent of all participants.
- The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), to which 159 countries, including Russia, Britain, France and China, belong, has also unanimously expressed its support for this proposal.
- Mayors for Peace, with a membership of more than 5,100 cities and municipalities around the world, is actively seeking the early start of negotiations toward an NWC. Likewise, the InterAction Council, a group composed of former heads of state and government, has called for the conclusion of an NWC.
- In September 2009, the UN Security Council held a special summit session in which it adopted Security Council Resolution 1887 pledging efforts to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.
- The worsening budgetary situation in different countries as a result of the ongoing economic crisis has prompted a serious rethinking of military expenditures, including in nuclear-weapon states where the costs of these armaments are finally being debated.

While it is clear that none of these developments, in itself, represents a decisive breakthrough, Ikeda believes that collectively they constitute a consistent and irreversible momentum toward the goal of a world finally free of nuclear weapons.

"The leading role played by civil society in developing a draft Nuclear Weapons Convention and in actively seeking the start of negotiations through petition drives and other activities clearly demonstrates that the spiritual wellspring and normative source for such a treaty exist as a vital presence in the hearts and minds of the world's ordinary citizens," writes Ikeda.

"What is required now," he adds, "is to take this living, breathing awareness – the determination that the tragedy wrought by nuclear weapons must never be repeated and that humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist – and give it concrete form as a binding legal agreement expressing the shared conscience of humankind."
“The only lasting basis for building a global society of peaceful coexistence lies in the transformation of each individual heart. This can be achieved only through the kind of dialogue and interaction that stirs each of us to the depths of our being.” Daisaku Ikeda, Peace Proposal 2012

The SGI president pleads for initiating concrete negotiations that will culminate in the realization of an NWC, and says: One way to do this would be to present it as a basic treaty establishing the legal framework of a world without nuclear weapons with a set of associated protocols. The basic treaty would allow signatory states to clearly commit to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons and undertake a process of mutual threat reduction.

Separate protocols could enumerate prohibited activities such as development and production, use or threat of use, and establish procedures for decommissioning and verification. Ikeda urges "NGOs and forward-looking governments" to establish an action group to embark on this venture.

"We should set a target of 2015 for the release – or better yet, the signing – of an agreed-upon draft of the basic framework treaty."

**Human Rights and Sustainability**

Along with nuclear abolition, Ikeda says: "Humanitarianism, human rights and sustainability need to be the core elements of a future vision." Such a vision comprises:

"A world that, refusing to overlook human tragedy wherever it occurs, unites in solidarity to overcome threats;
"A world that, based on the empowerment of individuals, gives priority to securing the dignity and right of all people to live in peace;
"A world that, remembering the lessons of the past, does not allow unborn generations to inherit the negative legacies of human history and directs all its energies to transforming those legacies."

For Ikeda, sustainable energy is also a key issue. Reflecting on the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011, he urges Japan to make a rapid transition to energy policies not reliant on nuclear power generation, and to intensify its involvement in renewable energy technology and research, both at home and to support efforts in developing countries.

In this context, the SGI president proposes strengthening of the global role of the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in dealing with the impacts of nuclear power plant accidents and decommissioning obsolescent reactors.

Considering the suffering caused by an increasing prevalence of natural disasters around the world, Ikeda calls for responses to be focussed on a human rights approach and proposes that the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) be officially expanded to include provision of relief for people displaced by such disasters.

He also stresses the importance of empowering women to play a greater role in disaster prevention, mitigation and recovery efforts. Ikeda writes: "Women bear a disproportionate burden of the deprivations resulting from disasters, and they are often exposed to grievous threats. At the same time, there is a need to afford greater recognition to women's special capacities to contribute.

"Women must be empowered as effective change agents in the fields of disaster risk reduction, recovery and reconstruction, in line with similar recognition of their potential roles in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. Specifically, disaster risk reduction and recovery could be included in the scope of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, or a new resolution could be adopted with a focus on the roles women play in these areas."

With an eye on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – popularly known as Rio+20 – in June in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, the SGI president calls for a broader debate on the concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from 2015.

Ikeda writes: "A set of common goals for a sustainable future should inherit the spirit of the Millennium Development Goals of alleviating the distortions in our global society generated by poverty and income disparities, and should also address the full range of human security issues."
NUKE ABOLITION

Global Support Peaks for No Nukes

By Jonathan Frerichs*

GENEVA - A new and compelling story about nuclear weapons is emerging around the world. The new story is having an impact because it is one that many can own. It displaces nuclear fiction with nuclear facts. 2012 has begun with sabre-rattling in the Middle East and will end with new leadership in five nuclear-armed states. What is this new story and what can it bring?

The shortest version of the story is the one told by the new International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). Ask anyone, "Can you imagine a world without nuclear weapons?" Expect the reply: "I can."

A slightly longer version emerged at a year-end seminar of international church-related advocates that met in Scotland, where many favour nuclear disarmament.

We live under a nuclear 'umbrella' that is outdated, unwieldy, extremely costly, and doesn't even work. People today see themselves as part of a global community. They want to live in ways that protect life instead of putting it at risk. Nuclear weapons are wrong and need to go. It's time to get involved. Each person can do his or her part; all can make a big difference, together.

The new story is making nuclear weapons more vulnerable. There is a new level of political and social pressure within leadership circles: 130 governments now support a Nuclear Weapons Convention at the United Nations, while 5000 mayors and thousands of parliamentarians and eminent citizens have joined nuclear abolition initiatives. Challenges to the weapons are geographic (nuclear-weapon-free zones), legal (humanitarian law), and financial (national deficits, sovereign debts and citizen divestment).

Government and military leaders are debunking nuclear strategies; climate science are indicting nukes environmentally; physicians, scientists, and lawyers are delegitimising nuclear arms; films, web-sites, and books are generating public debate; and world religions are condemning nuclear weapons morally, ethically, and spiritually. A disaster like Fukushima reminds people that even in its peaceful guise nuclear energy is lethal and causes lasting damage.

The international construct that shelters nuclear arms is coming apart. More and more people see no place for such weapons in human, ecological, and planetary affairs.

And yet those who challenge the current nuclear regime are by no means overcome with optimism. It is disturbing to watch the five percent of governments that are nuclear armed reject the common good and refuse their obligation to disarm while the 95 percent of governments that don't have nuclear weapons fail to implement the majority will to see them abolished.

The new and the old nuclear 'stories' offer different scenarios in 2012. Here are three examples:

First, Northeast Asia - a region where the umbrella of nuclear deterrence is outdated and leaky and where we can see how the shaky status-quo, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is collapsing. Though 'nuclear security' in Northeast Asia is a contradiction in terms, this year's Nuclear Security Summit will be held in Seoul.

The new nuclear story would draw regional lessons from what the Korean UN General Secretary has instructively called 'the infectious doctrine of deterrence'. Eight of the nine states that practice nuclear deterrence are invited to the summit, and the ninth state is next door. Infection needs a cure, for example, open-ended engagement around a shared regional goal such as denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. The ecumenical workshop in Scotland discussed confidence-building measures by Christians and Buddhists to help put that goal higher on the public agenda. Churches have been challenging the status quo from both sides of the DMZ for the past 25 years.

Second, the Middle East, another region where nuclear umbrellas don't work, is so ripe for proliferation that the very future of the NPT is tied to establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone there. A UN conference on that goal is slated for 2012 after a 17-year delay.

Yet the old nuclear story looms over the conference. Irresponsible rhetoric is again pushing the myopic view that enforcing the nuclear double standard is the solution for the Middle East, not the problem. While Israel is not a member of the NPT, its neighbours who are members have been expected to live with its nuclear weapons as if it were an NPT nuclear-weapon state. This is an improbable recipe for security of any kind. It is a prescription for proliferation by others in the Middle East, and elsewhere.

The new nuclear story is about the well-being of all states in the region, including Israel. A zone free of all WMDs including nuclear is part of the scenario from the outset. A regional process in the 1990s set a useful precedent by using incentives, reciprocity, and mutual commitments to solve delicate security issues.

Third, NATO is an alliance whose nuclear weapons are unusable and a waste of money. The organisation's 200-odd tactical nuclear weapons are emblematic of how much the aging behemoths of the Cold War still have in their nuclear arsenals and what little sense that makes. Removing these deadly relics would reduce the number of countries hosting nuclear weapons to nine from fourteen. It would also remove a major obstacle to new security arrangements between NATO and Russia.

In 2010 NATO and Russia agreed on 'contributing to the creation of a common space of peace, security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area'. Will NATO's 2012 summit in Chicago follow the new story or the old?

In the new nuclear story, nuclear archaeologists are used to understand the past and human security architects are proposing the future. Northeast Asia, the Middle East, and NATO are critical sites. The task is daunting and more hands are needed, but the precedent of progress is already set. Each New Year can now become part of our safer future rather than a vestige of the nuclear past. [IPS Columnist Service | January 2012] Copyright © 2011 IPS-Inter Press Service

*Jonathan Frerichs is programme executive for peace-building and disarmament for the World Council of Churches.
Latin America Seeks to Spread Nuclear Free Zones

By Emilio Godoy

MEXICO CITY - Latin America and the Caribbean are discussing ways to step up supervision of the use of nuclear materials in the region and contribute to the creation of more nuclear weapon free zones around the world, on the 45th anniversary of the treaty that banned nuclear arms in the region.

"Disarmament is still our priority" Vera Machado, under-secretary of political affairs in Brazil’s foreign ministry, told IPS. "It is a legitimate interest of nuclear weapon free countries to receive a binding guarantee that the countries that do have them will not use these weapons against them, or threaten to use them."

The official was one of the delegates of the 33 countries attending a conference in Mexico City held to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, also known as the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

The states party to the treaty agree to prohibit and prevent the "testing, use, manufacture, production or acquisition by any means whatsoever" and the "receipt, storage, installation, deployment and any form of possession of any nuclear weapons."

The anniversary, celebrated on Feb. 14-15 with a commemorative ceremony and international seminar, was also attended by representatives of international bodies and non-governmental organisations from different regions of the world.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco created the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) in 1967 – the first of the five such zones that currently include 114 countries around the world, in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

Mexico was the driving force behind the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which was opened up to signature in the foreign ministry in Tlatelolco on Feb. 14, 1967, making this country the pioneer in nuclear disarmament in the region. The treaty went into force in April 1969.

Mexico, Argentina and Brazil use nuclear material for peaceful purposes, such as the generation of electricity. Argentina and Brazil created the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC) in 1991 to monitor the exchange and use of nuclear materials. The agency is considered a model in this field.

The issues discussed at the seminar included the need to draw broader attention to the Treaty of Tlatelolco; the elimination of stocks of fissile materials still held by several states parties; the passage of nuclear submarines and radioactive waste through the region; and the advances made towards global disarmament.

"A regulatory architecture that complies with the Treaty of Tlatelolco is still needed," Irma Argüello, president of the Nonproliferation for Global Security Foundation in Argentina, told IPS. "It is important for third countries to stop bringing nuclear technology and weapons into our region."

Two issues that have awakened interest in Latin America are Iran’s nuclear programme, staunchly opposed by a group of countries led by the U.S., and Argentina’s complaint that Britain sent a nuclear-armed submarine to the Malvinas/Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic.

The idea is for the Latin American and Caribbean NWFZ to serve as a model for a similar scheme in the Middle East.

"These zones create new realities in which people live and develop new ways of thinking and new possibilities; they counteract the feeling of impotence, inevitability and submission," Kimiaki Kawai, programme director of peace affairs of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), told IPS.

For that reason, "These zones have a huge potential of moderating power," he added.

The Tokyo-based SGI forms part of a coalition that launched a global campaign for a summit meeting of world leaders calling for the total elimination of the nuclear bomb.

SGI wants the summit to be held in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2015, the 70th anniversary of the nuclear bombings that virtually annihilated the two Japanese cities.

Latin America’s NWFZ "is a good example for the Middle East," said Tibor Toth, executive secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO). "There is a concept more than a dream, different than it was in Latin America in the 1960s."

In recent years there have been some developments, but one may ask if they have been enough," he remarked to IPS. "We have to move beyond the 'realpolitik' of non-proliferation and disarmament."
Israel and Iran Agreed on Nuclear Ambiguity

By Pierre Klochendler

JERUSALEM - Will Israel attack Iran's nuclear facilities this spring? That is a question dominating the international agenda. Meanwhile, the grand project of a nuclear weapon-free Middle East is relegated to the utopian "day after" a solution is found to the Islamic republic's atomic programme.

Strangely enough, Israeli public opinion has no clear opinion on the subject, and relies on 'those who know best'. 'Those who know best', like Defence Minister Ehud Barak, say: "Should sanctions fail to stop Iran's nuclear programme, there'll be a need to consider taking action." "Whoever says 'later', could find that it's too late," he told an international conference in Herzliya, Israel, on Feb 2.

The concern shared by many defence analysts, including Israelis, is that an Israeli strike would not only unleash a terrible all-out war, but would only set Iran's nuclear programme back by just a few years.

"Tough sanctions and a united diplomatic front are the best chance for crippling Iran's nuclear programme," urged a New York Times op-ed on Friday.

On the other hand, Israeli defence officials have expressed concern that should the Iranian nuclear issue not be tackled head-on – either financially or militarily – the region would plunge into nuclear proliferation chaos, with potential leakage to non-actor states.

Such are the parameters of the debate; either an attack – with or without U.S. endorsement – or sanctions. What about alternatives, like the radical idea of a nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ) as strategy to neutralise Iran's nuclear programme?

Israeli governments have conditioned a regional NWFZ with achieving comprehensive peace with all of Israel's neighbours. This is virtually impossible given the current character of the Iranian regime. And, there's no progress on the Arab peace front.

Yet, civil society activists take succour from the fact that following the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, a follow-up conference will be convened this year in Finland.

The gathering will discuss an agreement on how to transform the region into a NWFZ and free of all other weapons of mass destruction. The host country has been accepted by all governments, including both Israel and Iran. "Most Israelis aren't even aware that their country's willing to contemplate the NWFZ idea," emphasises Hillel Schenker, co-editor of the Palestine-Israel journal, a Jerusalem-based quarterly run by both Israeli and Palestinian experts.

Last October, the former spokesperson for the Israeli branch of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War coordinated a meeting between Israeli and Iranian activists. Held in London under the auspices of a civil society initiative to establish a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Middle East, the meeting facilitated the development of areas of mutual understanding between both peoples.

Continued from page 29

Opened to signature since 1996, the CTBTO only needs to be ratified by eight more states to enter into force.

The idea of a NWFZ in the Middle East emerged in November 2011 during a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which reports to the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council.

There are more than 22,000 nuclear warheads in the hands of Russia, the United States, France, China, Britain, Israel, India and Pakistan.

Taking the Treaty of Tlatelolco as a starting point, Latin America and the Caribbean want to prepare for the review conference of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which has been in effect since 1970, although there is a widespread view that international nuclear disarmament mechanisms are paralysed.

"It is important for negotiations to take place in a constructive atmosphere," said Machado. "We must go beyond the constantly repeated arguments, in order to be able to create a NWFZ in the Middle East."

Israel, India and Pakistan have not signed the NPT, while China, Israel, Egypt, Iran and the United States have not ratified the CTBTO.

"Issues like transparency, monitoring and ratification are important for the operation of these zones," Toth said.

Kawai said the global movement against nuclear weapons must be strengthened, in order to offer a promising vision for the future. "We hope that NWFZ experiences are shared among governments and citizens, especially in regions like North-Eastern Asia and the Middle East."

Another matter of interest is the signing of bilateral accords between NWFZ states parties and the IAEA to oversee the use of nuclear materials. So far, around a dozen states have signed such agreements. [Copyright © 2011 IPS-Inter Press Service]
Such meeting is exceptional. By and large, public discussion is stifled by pressure at the helm. When ex-Mossad spy agency chief Meir Dagan questioned the judgment of Israel’s leaders that a military solution exists, Barak attacked his outspokenness, calling it “serious behaviour”.

Usually open to debate, Israelis tend to consider the nuclear question taboo or too complex for expressing dissenting opinions. It’s fine by most that only top acting political and military leaders assume that right, only in closed forums. Any relevant information in Hebrew is rare; information in English is abundant but arduous to analyse.

The absence of discussion stems also from the fact that, since the inception of its own nuclear programme in the late 1950s, Israel has officially stuck to a policy of “ambiguity”: it “won’t be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons in the region” is the official posture.

Israel is not an NPT signatory; Iran is. But both countries reject and refrain from any linkage between their respective nuclear programmes.

The secrecy shrouding their country’s programmes enables Israelis to feel that they participate in the defence of their state without having to grapple with its nuclear choices.

“If we as a society give any thought to nuclear weapons, it’s to Iran’s, which hasn’t yet become a reality,” notes Sharon Dolev, Greenpeace Mediterranean disarmament campaigner. “Like the hunchback who doesn’t see his hump, we don’t see our own weapons.”

Ambiguity therefore means that the international community should continue to ignore Dimona, believed to be the centre of the Israeli nuclear programme, and focus solely on Natanz, said to be the nerve centre of the Iranian nuclear programme.

Likewise, Iran is ambiguous with regard to its nuclear quest. While the International Atomic Energy Agency reported in November that Iran has engaged in activities related to the development of nuclear weapons, there’s no ‘smoking gun’ as to a decision to actually develop a bomb.

Israeli government officials praise “ambiguity” as it enhances Israel’s security almost as much as WMD. Assuming such a policy is necessary, nuclear demilitarisation activists propose a debate which would respect the constraints of not exposing Israel’s nuclear capability. Such discussion would strengthen the democratic character of their society.

“It’s still possible, even obligatory, to hold serious discussions about the need for nuclear weapons, the dangers they present regionally and globally, and the various possibilities for disarmament,” says Dolev.

Advocates of the abolition of Israel’s “nuclear opacity” believe that calling a spade a spade could gradually open the region towards arms control, if not creating a NWFZ.

“But if prevention (of Iran’s nuclear capability) fails, it’s unlikely that Israelis would look to arms control as a solution,” predicts Avner Cohen, author of the controversial ‘Israel and the Bomb’ (1998). All the more so given that during the Cold war, the backdrop to arms control dialogues was the declared existence of nuclear weapons.

Besides, Israelis almost consensually consider nuclear ambiguity as a case of force majeure, the most effective deterrent to what’s widely perceived here as the "existential threat" posed by Iran.

This linkage approach between WMD and extreme hostility, advocates of denuclearisation concede, takes precedence over all other considerations. Supposing Iran develops a bomb, "we don’t know which nuclear weapons state will disarm first, we do know which will disarm last. That country is Israel," says Cohen.

Many civil society activists conclude that it’s probably already too late for Israelis to persuade their leaders that getting out of the “ambiguity” bunker might defuse the Iranian time-bomb that’s already ticking dangerously. [Copyright © 2011 IPS-Inter Press Service]
Two Visions, One Choice

By Ernest Corea

WASHINGTON DC – Just a day after delivering his assertive State of the Union address on January 24, President Barack Obama visited Arizona and was greeted at the Phoenix airport by Republican Governor Jan Brewer who wagged an admonishing finger in his face as cameras clicked and whirred.

Numerous commentators described her action as discourteous and dumb. Discourteous – for obvious reasons. Dumb – because, as former Pennslyvania Governor Ed Rendell pointed out, it is in a state's best interests for its governor and the president to have a cordial working relationship.

Obama walked away eventually, leaving Brewer to announce to the media that he loves his country, and so does she. Later, Brewer visited the local media circuit, where she said she felt "threatened" by Obama. Was he going to attack her in the presence of the Air Force One crew, his Secret Service detail, invited local dignitaries, and his staff?

African-American academics have pointed out that "threatening" – like "menacing" – is a dog-whistle word that is heard for what it implies by fringe elements in society who cannot even in the 21st century come to terms with American diversity.

Meanwhile, Obama energetically continued his five state tour (Iowa, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, and Michigan), taking the messages of his State of the Union address to the people.

Re-Election Bid

The State of the Union address is mandated by Article II, Section 3, of the US Constitution, which stipulates that the sitting president "shall from time to time give to the Congress information on the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient."

In the past, some presidents sent their information to the houses of Congress in writing, others delivered the information in person. President Truman was the first president to have his address televised. President Johnson made it an evening prime time event and it has remained that way up to now, with countrywide viewers in the millions.

Presidents facing a bid for re-election often use the State of the Union address not only to satisfy their constitutional obligation but to outline, as well, their case for re-election. Past presidents who have done so with notable effect include Ronald Reagan (1984), Bill Clinton (1996) and George W. Bush (2004).

It was clearly Obama's intention to follow the same path, laying the foundation for the strenuous campaign that will take place between now and November. In an email to supporters shortly before he left the White House for Capitol Hill he wrote: "Tonight, we set the tone for the year ahead. I'm going to lay out in concrete terms the path we need to take as a country if we want an economy that works for everyone and rewards hard work and responsibility."

Picture: President Barack Obama delivers the State of the Union address in the House Chamber at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Official White House Photo by Pete Souza
Thus, his third State of the Union address found him swiveling from policy to politics. The policy: a manufacturing led economic revival that would provide benefits well into the future. As he put it – an economy built to last. The politics: an emphasis on fairness, particularly in the country's tax structure.

His rallying cry for the election was a call for "an economy where everyone gets a fair shot, everyone does their fair share and everyone plays by the same set of rules."

The skill with which he segued from one theme to another demonstrated yet again that he maintains a firm grasp on the art of political speech.

Working Together

He opened and closed his address with a tribute to the armed services, presenting them as an example of what achievements are possible when all work together to achieve the same objectives, and strive to protect each other. The example he provided was the dramatic and successful effort by Team 6 of the Navy Seals to capture and eliminate Osama bin Laden in his Abbottabad, Pakistan home. He did not refer to a more recent example, the rescue of two hostages – one American, the other Danish – held captive by pirates. However, when he was walking up to the podium, an open microphone "captured" him congratulating Defence Secretary Leon Panetta on a "good job tonight."

At the podium, he wasted no time in turning his back on those critics who write him off as a failure and emphasized what he considers to be his successes, including action to prevent the crash of the auto industry which has since turned itself around. If the industry had not been rescued and enabled to revive itself, job losses would have been devastating.

Other successes on his watch have been private sector job growth, deficit reduction of over $2 trillion, new rules for Wall Street, the end of the ill-conceived war in Iraq, and the end of Obama bin Laden which reduced the effectiveness of the al Qaeda movement.

He also dealt with politically sensitive issues such as the claim made by Republican aspirants to the presidency that concerns about economic inequality are grounded in envy. He also offered Israel (and its Amen Corner in the US) an ironclad recommitment to the security of Israel. He warned, too, that he would fight back if confronted by obstructionism, stating: "I will oppose any effort to return to the very same policies that brought on this economic crisis in the first place."

This, of course, raises the issue of new policies, which lead to politics, and the continuing election campaign.

Tax Imbalance

Economic inequities have been illustrated by Warren Buffet who pointed out that it simply did not make sense for him to be taxed at a lower rate than his secretary. The point was reinforced in a different context by Mitt Romney, a possible Republican nominee as presidential candidate this year.

Romney's recently released tax returns of the past two years – released under pressure of public opinion – showed that tax laws enabled him, a millionaire, to be taxed at a rate of 14.9 percent, a rate much lower than generally applied to a middle class salary.

Among the proposals Obama offered as a means of creating an economy that is "built to last," four stand out:

-- incentives for "insourcing" manufacturing jobs – more jobs in the US, including jobs brought back from overseas, with appropriate incentives,
-- education reform and increased training opportunities that will equip 2 million Americans with new skills,
-- energy initiatives, directed at enhancing the responsible use of domestic resources, and
-- nurturing values.

These are not the judgmental "social values" that pit people of different persuasions against each other, but values that protect society as a whole. To achieve this goal, Obama urged the Houses of Congress to end subsidies for millionaires, extend the payroll tax cut, provide home-owners with opportunities to refinance their loans, reduce the influence of money and lobbyists, set out appropriate rules for Wall Street, and create a balanced and fair deficit reduction plan.

Other Issues

In framing his views as categorically as he did, Obama presented a contrast between his vision of the future and those of the main contenders for the Republican candidature.

Issues other than those taken up by Obama will no doubt intrude. The fact that the US economy grew by an annualized rate of 2.8 percent in the final quarter of 2011 – up from 1.8 percent the previous year – will be turned into a talking point by his supporters. His detractors will pounce on the fact that unemployment hovers around 9 percent. And so on.

Mean-spiritedness of the kind exhibited during the last election and throughout his presidency will be repeated. This will include assaults on his American-ness. He is obviously aware of this. He used the word America or Americans 88 times in his address.

Obama for his part, and the Republican contenders for theirs, have presented voters with the opportunity for real choice in November. Makes for a fervent election campaign.
Going For Growth Despite Crisis

By J. C. Suresh

TORONTO - In the midst of unusual global economic uncertainty, caused by the unpredictable course economic policies could take in major economies over the next few years, the 34-nation OECD has come out with a flagship report passionately pleading for structural reforms as a way out of the crisis.

The report titled ‘Going for Growth’ identifies and reviews progress on five key priorities to boost long-term growth in each OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) country, but also in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia and South Africa (BRICS), that is, almost all of the non-OECD members of the Group of 20 (G20) comprising world’s major economies.

Presenting Going for Growth on February 24 in Mexico, OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría said: "Worst-case outcomes can be avoided if monetary policy remains very supportive, sovereign debt and banking sector problems in the euro area are contained, and excessive fiscal tightening is avoided where it could proceed gradually, such as in the United States."

Emerging economies will continue to enjoy sustained growth rates, he added, thus contributing to global recovery, provided they deal effectively with macroeconomic pressures, including inflation, and make progress in rebalancing demand, including through structural reforms.

"But even under this rather benign scenario, without profound change, unemployment would stay high through 2013, there would be no prospect of recovering the output foregone with the crisis, and public budgets would remain on unsustainable paths in a number of G20 countries," Gurria said.

The crisis has had a dire social cost. More than 200 million people are unemployed worldwide, and 45 million of them are in OECD countries – 14 million more that before the crisis. The situation is especially dramatic in terms of youth unemployment, which now stands at about 20% on average and reaches almost 50% in Spain.

"We must use every possible means to avoid the risk of a 'lost generation'. Another vital step to deal with the unemployment surge is to reverse the steep rise in the number of people who have been unemployed for a year or more. Today, this concerns a third of unemployed workers in the US, meaning wasted resources and, worse: exclusion and poverty," the OECD Secretary-General said.

Priority should therefore be given to policies that boost jobs. Going for Growth reform priorities would not only boost growth but also jobs, assured Gurria. He is convinced that structural policies recommended in Going for Growth can help alleviate the possibility that higher unemployment becomes entrenched in many countries.

"We must ensure that ongoing fiscal consolidation efforts do not affect the active labour market policies, which would help job seekers find work more quickly," said Gurria. For instance, the decision by Spain to permanently increase resources in the public employment services and to facilitate placement of job-seekers by private agencies was welcome.

Growth-friendly tax reforms could also help strengthen a job-rich recovery, while also helping fiscal consolidation insofar as they are implemented in a way that raises tax revenue. These include removing tax expenditures and shifting the tax burden towards tax bases that are more conducive to higher employment and growth, such as real estate, consumption and environmental taxes.

Gurría – a Mexican national – presented the report in Mexico City with Mexico’s finance minister Jose-Antonio Meade, ahead of February 25-26 meeting of G20 finance ministers. He said the OECD’s country-specific structural reform recommendations are applicable to all G20 countries as they steer their economies out of the crisis.

Since Going for Growth was launched in 2005, the annual report has identified key reform priorities to boost economic activity and raise living standards in each OECD country. Since 2011, the report also addresses reform potential in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia and South Africa, and has been a key part of the OECD’s wider contribution to the G20 Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth.

Picture: OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurria | Wikimedia Commons
A comprehensive reform package is necessary to alleviate the adverse short-term effects of some reforms while contributing to kick-start the economy, especially through investment induced by stronger product market competition. In any event, effective communication and consensus building are of the essence to foster the confidence households need to take advantage of reform-driven income gains.

The OECD report assesses and compares progress that countries have made on structural reforms since the start of the crisis, covering the 2007-2011 period. It shows that the pace of reform has accelerated where it is needed most – in the European countries hardest hit by the sovereign debt crisis, including Greece, Ireland, Portugal and most recently, Spain and Italy.

The new European reform agenda has been spurred by the need to consolidate public finances and better manage pressures from the sovereign debt crisis. This has led governments to announce and begin implementing politically difficult yet ambitious reforms in areas including pension schemes, labour market policies and product market liberalisation. "Structural reforms now underway in Europe will eventually help reduce the economic imbalances that contributed to the debt crisis," Gurría said.

The long-term gains from reforms are sizeable: recent OECD work shows that a broad and ambitious reform agenda could lift GDP growth by as much as one percent annually on average across the OECD area over the next decade, while delivering sizeable gains for emerging-market economies as well.

Drawing on three decades of reform experiences, the report finds that concerns about adverse short-term effects of such reforms are overblown. Indeed a number of structural reforms appear to boost growth fairly quickly, while usually very few if any have short-term costs.

"The design and timing of reforms matters. A broad package of reforms delivers more quickly and strongly than a piecemeal strategy," Gurría said.

OECD Deputy Secretary-General Pier Carlo Padoan, who is also the organisation’s chief economist, points to the often voiced and legitimate concern that structural reforms could initially deepen the slump. "The truth is that economic theory is thin and empirical evidence virtually non-existent on the short-term effects of reforms," he assures.

"Our new research . . . fills some of this gap and delivers an optimistic message: fears that reforms may depress economic activity in the short run are overblown. Indeed among the wide range of reforms we looked at, none was found to have had systematic adverse short-term effects in the past, while many quickly stimulated output and employment," says Padoan.

At the same time, he adds, OECD analysis suggests that some labour market reforms can indeed be temporarily detrimental if implemented in bad times. Where possible, these should wait until the labour market improves decisively, and be preceded by product and financial market reforms.

Another important implication of OECD analysis is that a comprehensive reform package is necessary to alleviate the adverse short-term effects of some reforms while contributing to kick-start the economy, especially through investment induced by stronger product market competition. In any event, effective communication and consensus building are of the essence to foster the confidence households need to take advantage of reform-driven income gains.

Another legitimate concern, says the OECD chief economist, is that reforms may harm the least well-off. Income inequality was already on the rise in most OECD countries before the crisis, and it has likely risen further in its aftermath. It is also a major issue in the BRIICS.

Padoan points out that two special chapters in the report yield encouraging lessons regarding what reforms do to inequality both in the long term and in the wake of macroeconomic shocks like financial crises. He adds:

"We find that several reforms, notably enhancing the quality and equity of secondary education, liberalising product markets and making employment protection legislation more uniform across workers, appear to have favourable growth and distributive impacts. Some tax reforms can also be beneficial on both grounds.

"Starting with a drastic cut in tax expenditures would seem especially warranted at the current juncture, not least since it would also help fiscal consolidation. Now not all growth-friendly reforms would yield such double or triple dividends, of course.

"In particular, it remains challenging to design tax and transfer systems in ways that are conducive to both higher growth and lower inequality. For one, the experience of some Nordic countries shows that it can be done. And again, broad reform packages including win-win policies could deliver on both goals."
Angels Invest Where Banks Dither

By Ramesh Jaura

For innovative young folks, angels are by no means mythical beings or messengers of God as depicted in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and the Quran. They are flesh-and-blood source of equity capital at the seed and early stage of company formation, particularly when banks are reluctant to lend.

These so-called "angel investors" usually invest between USD 25,000 and 500,000 in start-ups — and larger amounts through "angel groups" — and also leverage their expertise to provide mentoring to the entrepreneurial teams in which they invest.

Explaining their significance, a new report says: "While angel investment has existed in practice for centuries, the concept of angel investors as a powerful source of financing for high-growth companies has emerged over the past couple of decades in the United States and Europe and is rapidly growing in other regions around the world."

The report, titled 'Financing High-Growth Firms: The Role of Angel Investors', is authored by Karen Wilson who works in the Structural Policy Division of the OECD Science and Technology Directorate.

"OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) member countries were interested in learning more about the growing phenomenon of angel investing," Wilson tells IDN. "In particular, they wanted to understand how it works, how it is evolving and what types of policies might help facilitate further growth of this important source of financing start-ups," she adds.

Wilson has responded to OECD member countries' interest and offered an in-depth report providing insight into angel investment, including definitions, data and processes. The report reviews developments around the world and identifies some of the key success factors, challenges and recent trends. It also discusses policy measures for promoting angel investment, with examples from countries which have been active in this area.

The findings show that angel investments are increasing and, while precise data is hard to collect, the report points out that estimates of the total angel investment market in a number of countries are greater than traditional venture capital (VC) investment, particularly for seed and early stage financing.

In 2009, the total estimated angel market in the U.S. was USD 17,700 million compared to USD 18,725 million for the venture capital market. And in Europe the total estimated angel market, at USD 5,557 million exceeded the VC market which stood at USD 5,309 million.

While policy makers tend to focus on the venture capital market, which is more visible than the angel market, the data from the U.S. and Europe indicate that angel investors will continue to be critical in overcoming the financial and growth challenges facing entrepreneurs, in turn, contributing to innovation and job creation, says the report.

As part of the background research for this project, Wilson interviewed over 100 people from a mix of 32 OECD and non-OECD countries: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK and the United States.

"We chose a mix of developed and developing countries which provided a perspective on how angel investing develops over time and in different contexts," says Wilson replying email queries, and adds: "Within each country, we sought perspectives from a mix of angel investors, entrepreneurs, academics and policy makers." Many of the countries covered and interviewees were recommended by OECD members or practitioners. However, Wilson does not expect the report to lead new guidelines for OECD members.

Without exaggerating the significance of the report, she says, "it seems that this project was the first time angel investment has been examined on a global basis — previous work has mostly looked within a country or regional area and mostly focused on the U.S. and Europe."

She adds: "The OECD will continue to do work on angel and other forms of seed and early stage investing to help provide further evidence and information for policy makers about possible actions that can be taken in these areas. This is particularly important in today's economic environment given the difficulties many start-ups have in accessing funding."

According to the report, "the angel investment sector is not only growing, but also becoming more formalised and organised through the creation of angel groups and networks. In addition to the money provided, angel investors play a key role in providing strategic and operational expertise for new ventures as well as social capital (that is, their personal networks)."

The report finds that angel investors tend to be less sensitive to market cycles than venture capitalists, although a "wealth effect" could impact how much they are willing to invest when markets fluctuate. "However, in the current market environment, the lack of exits — whether through an IPO (initial public offering) or M&A (mergers and acquisitions) — has put a strain on both angel and venture investment."

At the same time, the internet has created opportunities for the creation of firms with smaller amounts of initial capital than more traditional technology and science sectors, says the report. These companies have been termed "lean start-ups" as they allow greater capital efficiency and more rapid testing and adjustment of products and/or business models. ☞
The German Blueprint of Euro-Disaster

By Julio Godoy

Throughout the 1990s, the German economic elite, supported by the conservative government of Helmut Kohl, and especially by the German central bank, the formidable Bundesbank, practised the policy of rigorous social adjustment to increase the country’s international competitiveness. The cornerstone of this policy was the artificial appreciation of the German currency, the Deutsche mark (D-Mark), deliberately triggered by the Bundesbank’s policy of high interest rates, allegedly to halt inflation.

This policy of high interest rates and the ensuing appreciation of the D-Mark created artificial costs for the local industry, which was forced to increase its productivity, especially by reducing labour costs. The first consequence was higher unemployment and lower salaries and social doleouts for workers. The second consequence was a substantial reduction of domestic demand, and an increase of poverty.

This was the real objective of the Bundesbank policy: to facilitate the economic elite’s plan to freeze salaries, to cut back the social welfare state, and in general, to consolidate the reign of neoliberalism in the country’s economy.

The meek attempts by unions and other workers’ groups to propose alternative policies failed: whenever their plans faced opposition, the economic elite, the Bundesbank, and the government agitated the phantoms of unemployment and of deindustrialisation of the country.

Their main argument was that economic globalisation and the increased competitiveness from emerging developing countries, especially in South East Asia, would not give Germany other alternative than to tighten the belts. In this context of increased competition, so the official argument, the welfare state had become a costly luxury that the country could no longer afford.

When Helmut Kohl was voted out of office in 1998, and a coalition of Social Democrats and Greens overtook the government, some naïve observers believed that these policies would be supplanted, along the a more traditional leftist, continental European tradition. Those expectations were soon proved to be unfounded – the government of Gerhard Schroeder and his opportunist ally Joseph Fischer strangled even more the middle and lower classes, by reducing unemployment and other social allocations, by creating a very low-paid labour market, and by reducing the social costs of entrepreneurs, always following the argument outlined above.

Angel investors have been able to invest in this space and support companies through an "early exit" (usually M&A) without needing VCs to come in for later rounds. Besides, angel investors support a much wider range of innovation than VC firms as they traditionally invest locally and in a wider range of sectors than venture capitalists.

This means there is broader investment coverage both in terms of industry sectors and geography. In fact angels live everywhere, not only in areas where VCs have offices, which tend to be concentrated in a few technology or science hubs, finds the report.

However, it also means that angel investors can also be involved in companies that are not necessarily technology intensive or high growth as well as companies in later stages of development. Like VCs, angel investors tend to invest in a portfolio of companies, not just in one or two.

According to the report, universities are often highlighted as an important potential source of start-ups. But often these companies are more research rather than commercially focused and therefore do not succeed as often in securing angel or venture capital as often as assumed.

"This example points to a potential disconnect between innovation policies, which tend to focus on R&D rather than commercialisation, and entrepreneurship policies which focus on the translation of innovation into firms," notes the report.

It points out that given the local nature of angel investing, there is no homogeneous national angel market. The level, sophistication and dynamics of angel investment can vary greatly across regions within countries and therefore policy makers must take this into account. In fact, in a number of countries such as Canada and the United States, angel policies are implemented at the regional rather than the national level.

Further, angel investment can vary greatly across countries, both in terms of volume and approach. Policies that have worked in one country may not necessarily work the same way, or be as successful, in another country. Also, while policies targeting angel investment are being put in place in a growing number of countries, there have been few formal evaluations of these programmes to date.

Wilson is of the view that there are several reasons for the lack of knowledge about angel investment. Traditionally individual angel investors have preferred to keep information about their investments private. Even as the industry has professionalised with the formation of groups and networks, accurate data collection has remained a major challenge.

Another key issue, says the author, is the one of definitions. Often the words business angels or angel investors, informal investor and informal venture capital are used interchangeably. However, most definitions clearly differentiate investment from founders, family and friends from angel investors, who do not have a personal connection to the entrepreneur prior to making an investment.
The scheme worked. Germany is today Europe's undisputed power house, and one of the leading economies in the world. German industrial goods – from consumer goods to industrial equipment – inundate the world markets, from the People's Republic of China to Brazil, from South Africa to Mexico. This success gives apparent legitimacy to the German pretention to lead Europe, and to impose its own economic and social programme on other European countries, especially across the Euro zone, in countries such as Greece, Portugal, Spain, and even Italy and France, plagued by the sovereign debt crisis.

Two important considerations

However, this reading of the recent German economic history leaves aside two important considerations. One is related to social justice within the country. The second refers to inherent contradictions between the European market rationale, and the demand imposed upon countries affected by the debt crisis.

On the one hand, not all belts were tightened – only those of people dependent on salaries and welfare state services. Germany paid its apparent economic success with a disruption of the social equilibrium that characterised the country since the birth of the German federal republic in 1949 – that is, with increasing poverty among wide ranges of the country's population, and by decreasing the quality of social and economic chances for its younger generations.

Numerous studies prove that the accumulation of wealth skyrocketed since the mid 1990s, and has not stopped to increase ever since. Between 2002 and 2008, the country's total wealth rocketed since the mid 1990s, and has not stopped to increase ever since. Between 2002 and 2008, the country's total wealth increased by more than seven percent in real terms – it went up by the unimaginable amount of 1,100 million Euros! In the same period, however, poverty also increased.

Some one third of the population – that is, some 25 million people – possess no wealth at all, no savings, no real estate, nothing. They take home only a small income, which allows them just to survive. Meanwhile, the top ten percent of the population owns more than 60 percent of that wealth. The dense concentration of wealth is even more marked at the top one percent of the population.

Another clear illustration of the social consequences of the appreciation of the D-Mark is the evolution of salaries since the mid 1980 – in real terms, they are lower today than 25 years ago. That is, middle and lower classes today have at their disposal today a lower purchasing power than one generation ago. Furthermore, costs for education have increased, in the form of fees at public universities and other institutions, or of reduction of services at public schools, libraries, and the like.

No wonder then that in most university and technical schools students today belong to upper and upper middle class households. For the children of the poor, education is no longer available, or of such poor quality, that it does no longer represents the social mobility factor it used to until the late 1970s.

But these policies are not the only factor that allowed Germany to remain the industrial leading nation it is today. The introduction of the Euro ten years as common currency in 17 countries in Europe was equally important – more than 60 percent of Germany's total exports go to a Euro country.

For Germany, the Euro had the same effects as of currency devaluation – by reducing relative costs, the Euro let the German exports to partner countries boom. However, this wouldn't have been possible if those countries would have carried out a similar policy as in Germany – one of choking the local demand, and strangling consumption, as Germany has been doing for the past 20 years. That is, without the disposition to consume German goods that prevailed in Greece, Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy throughout the past decade, the German expansion wouldn't have been possible. In other words: The sovereign debt in the European Mediterranean area is the other side of the boom in German exports.

Debt crisis

Since the outbreak of the debt crisis in Europe, the German conservative government of Angela Merkel, in coalition with the usual suspects at the International Monetary Fund, and the international financial markets, has forced a drastic policy of austerity and so called internal devaluation – that is, mass unemployment, cuts in salaries, social allocations, and the like – in Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and France. In some countries, this global coalition has even forced elected governments – albeit inept and/or corrupt ones – out of office, as in Greece and in Italy, and imposed new illegitimate regimes of ideological allied technocrats. Merkel is also supporting the incoherent, corrupt government of Nicolas Sarkozy in France, in an effort to improve the latter's slight chances to be re-elected president next April.

An example suffices to illustrate the incoherencies of present economic and fiscal policies in Europe. Apparently to increase state revenues, Sarkozy has announced that his government will increase the value added tax – a tax that sanctions consumption. At the same time, the government will marginally reduce the social costs of labour paid for by employers.

The results of the second measure will at best be negligible – the cost reductions will be so marginal that no new investment is likely to occur as consequence. But the first measure will further choke consumption, of French and of European goods, precisely at a time when demand should be supported, and not strangled. But who cares about coherence, if the real goal is to further impoverish the have-nots, and benefit the immediate friends and allies?

No wonder then that the European austerity plan has failed to work. It has actually pushed Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France deeper into recession, impoverished large chunks of the population. The plan has in fact put Greece at the brink of a civil war. In France, Portugal, and Spain the social crisis could not be more evident – in Paris, so called marches de misere, or markets of misery, where scavengers sell and buy debris to and from the poorest people, have mushroomed during the last couple of years. The youth unemployment in Spain has reached world records – and the prospects couldn't be bleaker.

Moreover, the austerity plan measures, applied in countries already suffering from deep recession, are simply irresponsible. You don't need to hold a doctor's degree in economics to understand that it is exceptionally counterproductive to try to improve the state revenues by strangling economic activity during a downward business spiral.

And: if Greeks, Spaniards, Portuguese, French and Italian citizens no longer consume, who will buy the German industrial products? Questions like these may sound rhetorical but they are of utmost significance, questions which Angela Merkel and her allies refuse to answer.
NOT A TIME FOR CASUAL GAMES WITH IRAN

By Ernest Corea*
IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis

WASHINGTON DC (IDN) – Compelling advice against a hasty, unilateral decision by Israel to “bomb, bomb, bomb” Iran has come – from Israel. The advice is significant not only for what was said, but for who said it.

Meir Dagan, former head spook of Israel’s intelligence service Mossad delivered the back-off counsel against impulsive military action. Presumably, his sense of caution is supported by information not in the public domain.

NUCLEAR INDUSTRY UPBEAT DESPITE FUKUSHIMA

By Richard Johnson
IDN-InDepth NewsReport

LONDON (IDN) - One year after Fukushima, industry leaders remain optimistic on the future of nuclear power in coming decades, partly because of the high priority that has been placed on identifying and addressing potential weaknesses such as were revealed last year at Fukushima Daiichi, Japan.

GREEK DEBT’S GORDIAN KNOT REMAINS TIED

By Ramesh Jaura
IDN-InDepth NewsAnalysis

BERLIN (IDN) - A cocktail of responses to the Greek restructuring deal is lending an aura of ‘love, peace and harmony’ – as the German saying goes – to the marathon run to resolve the multi-layered debt crisis. But hardly anyone is convinced that the finish line has been reached.

WESTERN FIRMS WARNED OF ‘RESOURCE NATIONALISM’ IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

By Jaya Ramachandran
IDN-InDepth NewsReport

LONDON (IDN) – Western companies should guard against high risks involved in doing business as usual with African countries that have recently discovered offshore oil. A new report asks them to be prepared to manage the perils stemming from “resource nationalism” in institutionally fragile and politically volatile nations.
Toward a World without Nuclear Weapons

2011 Report of the Joint Media Project

Conducted by Inter Press Service (IPS) and Soka Gakkai International (SGI)
in cooperation with Media Network of Global Cooperation Council

http://www.nuclearabolition.net/documents/Beyond_Nuclear_NON-Proliferation.pdf