The Saga Of German Weapons For The Arab World: Once a year, the German government reports the amounts of weapons the country’s military industry exported to the world during the previous 12 months. Once a year, German society pretends to be scandalised by the numbers and particularly the recipients of the weapons. Pages 18-19

REMEMBERING HIROSHIMA AND OUR COMMON FUTURE
**Global Perspectives**

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Hiroshima Cenotaph
Credit: Wikimedia Commons
Consolidating Rule of Law in Haiti

By J. C. Suresh

NEW YORK (IDN) - “The objective of every peacekeeping mission is for the national authorities to take over the responsibilities to which the mission makes its contributions,” says Sandra Honoré of Trinidad and Tobago, who is Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Haiti and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission there, known as MINUSTAH, a position she assumed in July 2013.

“The outcome I would like to see in Haiti is one in which the four areas of focus of the Mission in this phase of consolidation is fully taken over by the Government of Haiti, so the Mission can leave with satisfaction that the Government has fully taken up its responsibilities and that security in country is be assured by the National Police with, as I’ve said, at least a minimum of 15,000 agents, putting it into a good situation to keep developing,” Honoré adds.

MINUSTAH was authorized in the aftermath of the ouster of President Bertrand Aristide and augmented after the destruction of the 2010 earthquake that took some 220,000 lives including 96 UN peacekeepers. Following the completion of Presidential elections in 2011 that allowed the Government to take over its full role in coordinating recovery, MINUSTAH has been working to fulfil its original mandate to restore a secure and stable environment, to promote a functioning political process, to strengthen Haiti’s Government institutions and rule-of-law-structures and to promote and to protect human rights.

In an interview with the UN News Centre, Honoré ensured that progress was not endangered by the drawdown and eventual withdrawal of MINUSTAH in 2016. “We have been working with the Government and the Haitian National Police (HNP) with respect to building the capacity of the police, working for the professionalization of the police and increasing the numbers of police who are available to provide for security throughout the national territory.”

The police in Haiti were some 5,000 in number when MINUSTAH was established. That number has increased to 11,228 and, of these, 950 are women, she said, adding: “One of our goals is to increase the number of female police officers serving and we see that the Haitian National Police is on a definite path of improvement in its performance, the manner it acquests itself of its security responsibilities and our goal is to work with the HNP so that their number increases to a minimum of 15,000 by the year 2016, at which time additional work will still be required. When we consider that the population of Haiti is 10 million, 15,000 is the goal that we have set but the HNP will have to continue its development path.”

Excerpts from the interview follow.

State of the government

Honoré: There has been a long period of acute polarization in the politics of the country, a long period of stalemate between the executive and legislative branches. What was interesting about the inter-Haitian dialogue which took place between 24 January and 14 February this year was that, for the first time in the country’s recent political history, various currents of opinion were able to sit around the same table: the executive, the legislative and political parties to discuss a number of issues of critical importance to the country such as elections, such as an amendment to the constitution and also the question of governance.

That dialogue ended with the signing of an accord, the Accord of El Rancho, in which the participants agreed to the holding of one combined election in 2014 for two-thirds of the Senate, for the entire Chamber of Deputies and for the municipalities and territorial collectives – local elections. Elections for the municipalities have been delayed since 2011, the Senate is now function with two-thirds of its membership because the mandate of one third has already expired.

If elections are not held this year, this would mean that another third of the Senate would see its mandate come to an end, by January 2015. That would mean that the Parliament would be dysfunctional. The mandates of the Chamber of Deputies will end in October, and therefore the idea of one combined election to fill the Parliament and the municipalities was a very good idea. We look forward to the work that will be done by the electoral counsel, by the Government, to organize transparent and inclusive elections to fill these posts before the end of 2014.

Efforts to deal with the cholera outbreak

The UN country team in Haiti and MINUSTAH have worked with the Government since the outbreak of the epidemic in support of its efforts to eliminate cholera from Haiti. The overall incidence of the disease has now been reduced by
half and fatality rates are now below one per cent, which is the alert threshold defined by the World Health Organization, globally. The persistence of cholera in Haiti is mainly due to the lack of accessibility of the population to clean water and to appropriate sanitation facilities. The number of cases that we have seen since the outbreak in 2010, in 2011, for instance, 53 per cent of the total number were recorded, while in 2013 only six per cent of that large number of 680,000 cases since the outbreak.

So what we are seeing is that there is in fact a drop in the number infections, a significant drop in the number of fatalities and, for the month of January 2014, we saw the lowest number of cases and cholera-related deaths since the beginning of the epidemic in October 2010. These results show that the strategy that the UN is employing in support of the efforts of the Government, focused on reducing the factors that will increase the spread during the dry season is in fact bearing fruit.

What Haiti can achieve before the departure of MINUSTAH in 2016

The best hopes have to do with the four areas on which the Mission is now concentrating in this phase of its consolidation. Those have to do with our work in support of the professionalization and modernization of the Haitian National Police, the strengthening of the rule of law and the promotion and protection of human rights, the strengthening of the national capacity for electoral management and the use of dialogue as a means of arriving at consensus, the use of consensus-building in the consideration of the critical issues which the country faces, the challenges which the country faces and the direction of the energies of the authorities and of the population as a whole toward the goal of the country for sustained economic development.

[IDN-InDepthNews – April 29, 2014] ◊

Photo on page 4: Sandra Honoré, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti.
Credit: UN Photo /Paulo Filgueiras

Credit: UN Photo /Paulo Filgueiras
Sri Lanka Remains Committed to Reconciliation

By Kalinga Seneviratne*

COLOMBO (IDN) - Rejecting the resolution passed at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on March 27 to mount an 'independent' international investigation into alleged human rights violations in Sri Lanka, President Mahinda Rajapakse said that Sri Lanka would continue with its own reconciliation process that was started after the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was defeated in May 2009.

The resolution, which was adopted by 24 votes to 12 with 12 abstentions, has been described by the government as a lop-sided vote where most of those voting for it were Europeans.

"The EU votes as a block and the US had more than a dozen votes already in the bag while we started with none," Rajapakse pointed out in a meeting with foreign media representatives in Colombo.

Two days after the vote, posters appeared all over Colombo claiming a moral victory and questioning the UNHRC mandate. It thanked the 24 nations that did not vote for the resolution including giant neighbour India. Government spokespeople have noted that these 24 nations were a better reflection of the views of the international community.

If there was any doubt about Sri Lanka's commitment to reconciliation, it were the Sri Lankan cricketers that delivered a telling blow to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and her supporters, who have claimed that Tamils and minorities are being marginalized in the country.

Just a week after the UNHRC vote, Sri Lanka's cricket team won the T20 World Cup in Dhakka, which sent the cricket crazy nation into a frenzy of celebrations.

The ethnically mixed team is widely supported across the country and when the man of the match and retiring cricket legend Kumar Sangakara told a worldwide television audience at the presentation ceremony that they won the cup for 20 million Sri Lankans "each one of them" he emphasized, there were no doubts in the country that it is in fact the reality.

I watched the cricket final at a hotel in Pasikudah in eastern Sri Lanka, an area that was under LTTE rule a few years ago. I watched it with five of the Tamil staff at the hotel, each of them cheering every Sri Lankan boundary and when the final victory was achieved over India, they spontaneously sang a Tamil celebratory song. Sinhalese for long believed that Tamils, particularly in the East and North of the country, supported India when it came to cricket. But what I was witnessing was a new Sri Lanka perhaps.

Next morning I listened to an interview on Sri Lankan radio where a senior military officer in north, explained how they set up huge TV screens in the northern Tamil strongholds of Jaffna, Kiliinochi and Malaitivu where thousands of Tamils gathered to watch the game and later celebrated along with the army officers when Sri Lanka won.

Two days later I was driving past a well-known Muslim area near Wattala on my way to the airport, where men, women and children have lined up the road waving the Sri Lankan lion flag waiting for the motorcade of the returning cricketing heroes to arrive.

The Asian Tribune reported on April 13 that the US Secretary of State John Kerry had issued a New Year message to all Sri Lankans (who celebrated the New year on April 14) saying he hoped this New Year will bring a new opportunity for all Sri Lankans to join together in the spirit of tolerance, reconciliation, and peace.

Perhaps because the US does not play cricket, he was not aware of the celebrations just a week earlier where such a spirit of tolerance, reconciliation and peace was evident.

What offends many Sri Lankans is the patronizing attitudes of Western nations and some UN officials, where they think they have the solutions to all the problems in the world. Even India found the latest UNHRC resolution too intrusive and refused to back it.

India's Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh was quoted in the media in Colombo as saying that what the UNHRC was trying to do on the Sri Lankan issue through the resolution adopted in Geneva was beyond its mandate. "It is not for the UN to investigate Sri Lanka and that India's position has always been it is a national prerogative to investigate human rights issues," she said.

Sri Lanka has welcomed India's principled stand and President Rajapakse ordered the immediate release of 79 Indi-
On April 10, Sri Lankan authorities said that the army has killed the three gunmen who escaped during the shootout with the police, during another shootout in the North. They named all three of them as former LTTE combatants who were rehabilitated after surrendering to the army in the final stages of the war, and released to the community.

**Senior LTTE leader apprehended**

On April 8, Sri Lankan defence establishment also revealed that a senior LTTE leader known as Nanthagopan, who has been functioning as one of the two deputy leaders of the LTTE overseas network was apprehended in Iran on March 6 travelling on a forged passport to visit his family living in Germany, and he was subsequently sent back to Sri Lanka via Malaysia. Sri Lankan defence officials are said to be elated by the capture of Nanthagopan as he is a key LTTE functionary with first-hand knowledge of current overseas LTTE operations.

Thus the Sri Lankan government is pointing out to its critics in the UNHRC and in the West that the army need to be on alert in the former LTTE strongholds, and the western government need to take action to stop their countries becoming safe havens for terrorist fundraising.

Writing in the Colombo Telegraph, Melbourne based Tamil physician Dr Noel Nadesan, who has visited Jaffna 13 times in the past 5 years and helped to set up a private health clinic in his homeland, argues that whether you like him or not, diaspora Tamils need to appreciate that President Rajapakse has ended a brutal war and opened up new opportunities for their people.

Rather than becoming overnight human rights champions, he appeals to fellow Tamil diaspora to help rebuild the communities in their homeland.

“We have to recognise the gains of peace if we are to move forward. Politics can cloud the issues and make us easily forget the bloody past,” argues Dr Nadesan, and referring to the LTTE holding 400,000 Tamils as human shields in the last days of the war, he adds, “taking cover behind unarmed civilians is a shameful act not worthy of our so-called heroes. It was a cowardly act”.

“Going back to confrontational politics can only lead us tortuously to political turmoil again,” warns the Sri Lankan born Australian doctor, in an impassioned plea to his overseas Tamils (and perhaps the likes of Navi Pillay as well). “Our people cannot live on a diet of politics forever. We need economics to raise our heads from the depths of misery. We have to postpone politics for the time being.”

[IDN-InDepthNews – April 17, 2014] ♦

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* Kalinga Seneviratne is IDN Special Correspondent for Asia-Pacific. He teaches international communications in Singapore.
Aid to Sub-Saharan Expected to Decline

By Jaya Ramachandran

PARIS (IDN) - While the trend of rise in international development assistance, which increased by 6.1 percent in real terms in 2013, is expected to continue in 2014 and stabilize thereafter, the declining share of aid for sub-Saharan countries, which need it most, looks likely to continue, according to an annual survey of donor spending plans by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

Shifted aid allocations

According to the DAC report, within bilateral net ODA, non-grant disbursements (including equity acquisitions) rose by about 33% in real terms from 2012. Total grants rose 7.7% in real terms; excluding debt forgiveness grants, they rose 3.5%. Net aid for core bilateral projects (excluding debt relief grants and humanitarian aid) rose by nearly 2.3% in real terms and core contributions to multilateral institutions by 6.9%.

Bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa was USD 26.2 billion, a decrease of 4.0% in real terms from 2012. Aid to the African continent fell by 5.6% to USD 28.9 billion. Excluding debt relief, which was high in 2012 due to assistance to Côte d’Ivoire, net aid in real terms rose by 1.2% to sub-Saharan Africa but fell by 0.9% to the continent as a whole.

Bilateral net ODA to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) rose by 12.3% in real terms to about USD 30 billion. However, there was exceptional debt relief for Myanmar in 2013. Details on the impact of debt relief on aid flows to LDCs will be available later this year.

Donor performance

The survey finds that the largest donors by volume were the US, Britain, Germany, Japan and France. Denmark, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden continued to exceed the 0.7% ODA/GNI target and the UK met it for the first time. The Netherlands fell below 0.7% for the first time since 1974.

Net ODA rose in 17 countries, with the largest increases recorded in Iceland, Italy, Japan, Norway and the UK. It fell in 11 countries, with the biggest decreases in Canada, France and Portugal.

The G7 countries provided 70% of total net DAC ODA in 2013, and the DAC-EU countries 52%.

The US remained the largest donor by volume with net ODA flows of USD 31.5 billion, an increase of 1.3% in real terms from 2012. US ODA as a share of GNI was 0.19%. Most of the increase was due to humanitarian aid and support for fighting HIV/AIDS.

By contrast US net bilateral aid to LDCs fell by 11.7% in real terms to USD 8.4 billion due in particular to reduced disbursements to Afghanistan. Net ODA disbursements to sub-Saharan Africa fell by 2.9% to USD 8.7 billion.
ODA from the 19 EU countries that are DAC members was USD 70.7 billion, a rise of 5.2% in real terms from 2012, and 0.42% of their combined GNI.

ODA rose or fell in DAC-EU countries as follows: Austria (+0.7%), Belgium (-6.1%):
- due to lower levels of debt relief in 2013 compared to 2012; Czech Republic (-4.7%):
- due to a decrease in bilateral aid to Afghanistan; Denmark (+3.8%); as it increased its bilateral aid; Finland (+3.5%): reflecting an overall scaling up of its aid; France (-9.8%): due to lower levels of loans disbursements and debt relief compared to 2012; Germany (+3.0%):
- due to a rise in bilateral lending and higher contributions to international organisations; Greece (-7.7%):
- due to austerity measures; Ireland (-1.9%): despite continued budgetary pressures, Ireland has largely stabilised allocations to ODA, with 2013 volumes marginally decreasing on the 2012 levels.

Aid from Italy rose by 13.4%: the Italian government had made a firm commitment to increase its ODA allocations to 0.16% of GNI in 2013 and reached this target. Luxembourg’s ODA/GNI ration increased by 1.2%.

The ODA/GNI ratio in the Netherlands fell below 0.7% due to overall aid budget cuts. But the Netherlands says it remains committed to the 0.7% target and to innovative, results-oriented support mechanisms and partnerships to increase the leverage of its development efforts.

The DAC annual survey finds further: 8.6% rise in ODA/GNI ration in Poland due to increased contributions to EU Institutions: a 20.4 percent decline in Portugal’s due to financial constraints leading to budget cuts; 2.4 percent rise in the Slovak Republic; 0.6% decline in Slovenia’s; 3.7% rise in Spain’s due to debt relief operations in sub-Saharan Africa: 6.3 percent in Sweden’s due to increases in its bilateral aid and aid to international organisations; and 27.8 percent in Britain’s as it put into place firm budget allocations to meet the 0.7% ODA/GNI target.

In 2013, net ODA by the 28 EU member states was USD 71.2 billion, or 0.41% of their combined GNI.

Net disbursements by EU Institutions to developing countries and multilateral organisations were USD 15.9 billion, a fall of 13.1% from 2012, due especially to a lower volume of concessional loans.

Net ODA rose or fell in other DAC countries as follows:
- Australia (-4.5%): as it delayed expenditure due to reprioritisation of its aid program to focus on the Indo-Pacific region. Australia’s aid remains stable and on track for an estimated expenditure of A$ 5 billion in 2013-14.
- Canada (-11.4%): due to exceptional payments made in 2012 for climate change and debt relief and to budget cuts affecting 2013
- Iceland (+27.4%); as it is increasing its aid programme;
- Japan (+36.6%): due to increases in debt forgiveness and bilateral lending
- Korea (+4.8%): due to scaling up aid overall
- New Zealand (-1.0%): due to an increasing aid programme being offset by inflation
- Norway (+16.4%): due to planned growth in the development cooperation budget, together with an increase in disbursements to Brazil
- Switzerland (+3.4%): reflecting the overall scaling up of its aid to reach 0.5% of GNI by 2015.

Other donor countries reported preliminary ODA figures as follows:
- Estonia (+22.3%): due to increases in humanitarian aid and contributions to EU Institutions;
- Hungary (-2.1%); Israel (-6.2%); Latvia (+12.2%); Russia (+26.4%): due to an increase in bilateral aid;
- Turkey (+29.7%): continuing the significant expansion of its development co-operation programme in recent years; the large increase in 2013 is due in part to the crisis in Syria; and UAE (+375.5%): due to exceptional measures to address financial and infrastructure needs in Egypt; its ODA/GNI ratio rose to 1.25%, the largest reported share of any country in 2013.

In 2013, DAC countries’ gross ODA (i.e. without deducting loan repayments) was USD 151.2 billion, an increase of 9.5% in real terms from 2012.

Within bilateral gross ODA, non-grant financial instruments rose by 27.3% in real terms, representing nearly USD 18 billion. The largest donors on a gross basis were the US, Japan, the UK, Germany and France.

Further outlook

The 2014 DAC Survey on Donors’ Forward Spending Plans gives estimates of future aid allocations for all DAC members, major non-DAC and multilateral donors up to 2017, based on developing countries’ gross receipts of Country Programmable Aid. CPA thus differs from ODA, especially by counting multilateral agencies’ outflows rather than inflows.

The CPA increase predicted last year for 2013 did translate into increased overall ODA, and affected all income groups. Global CPA rose by 10.2% in real terms in 2013 to USD 103.1 billion, but with widely differing increases from DAC members (+2.0%), multilateral agencies (+17.6%), and non-DAC donors (+123.7%).

CPA is projected to increase slightly by 2.4% in real terms in 2014, due to continued increases by a few DAC donors and multilateral agencies, and is expected to remain stable beyond 2014. [IDN-InDepthNews – April 19, 2014]
Finance Aid in A New Era

By Jon Lomøy*

PARIS (IDN | OECD) - By the end of 2015, when the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) come to term, the international community is expected to approve a new sustainable development agenda. All indications are that this will be a unique and universal agenda, focusing on the eradication of extreme poverty, but also addressing broader environmental, economic and social sustainability challenges. Finding the means to finance this broad agenda, and to make that financing work to produce maximum results without duplication or gaps, will be a challenge.

ODA – official development assistance or what people commonly refer to as aid – has been instrumental in financing development over the past fifty years through grants and low-interest loans that have helped to address economic and social needs. Likewise, private finance has provided considerable benefits to some countries through bank lending, direct investment and indirect investments such as portfolio flows. Nonetheless, we cannot rely on private finance alone, as it can introduce volatility and fuel vulnerability to financial crises, with costly and damaging results in some cases.

Today, many developing countries are complementing traditional development resources by successfully mobilising increasing volumes of domestic resources through improved tax systems and by better combatting illicit financial flows.

This trend is substantially augmented by a major transformation of the international development finance landscape – with new actors, new sources of finance and new technologies – enabling partnerships that have vastly expanded opportunities and options for tapping additional sources of development finance, both within and outside of countries.

In this context, the challenges faced by the global community are not simple. What is the continuing role of official development finance in the post-2015 era? How should it best be allocated and delivered to ensure it is as effective as possible?

The advent of a new post-2015 agenda, including a new financial framework, and the possibility of establishing a process to monitor their implementation, is an exciting prospect and one that merits the global community’s full attention to important questions:

- How to mobilise and channel the resources needed?
- What is the ongoing role of development co-operation in a much more diversified financing landscape? How can it make the largest possible contribution?
- How can developing countries make best use of the financial resources on offer?
- How can the international system facilitate this (e.g. through capacity support, transparency and accountability)?
- How can the international community ensure that no countries – or communities within them – are left behind?

The first High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation offers a unique opportunity to table these discussions and contribute to forging a sustainable development vision for the post-2015 era.

It will also provide the opportunity to encourage synergies among country, regional and global policy discourse on development financing needs and sources.

The participation of UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurria, ministers from developed and developing countries, heads of foundations and others will be fundamental in pushing forward the global debate on the future of development finance.

We expect concrete deliverables to emerge, helping to ensure that the changing landscape of development co-operation can operate within an effective and sustainable policy and financing framework.

[IDN-InDepthNews – April 14, 2014] ※

*Jon Lomøy is Director of the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate, which is leading work to modernise the DAC statistical system and devise new, broader measure of total official support for development. This feature article originally appeared in DACnews April 2014 under the headline ‘Financing development co-operation in a new era’. Photo: OECD
NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Hiroshima Meet Falls Short of Outlawing Nukes

By Monzurul Huq*

TOKYO (IDN) - The mere fact that the two-day foreign ministerial meeting of the 12-nation coalition of non-nuclear states took place in the Japanese city of Hiroshima, gives the clue to its symbolic significance. Being the first city in the world to witness the horrors of atomic destruction, Hiroshima, from that very fateful day almost 70 years ago, remains at the forefront of global efforts to learn about the devastating impact weapons of mass destruction can cause and also serves as a reminder of the necessity of eliminating nuclear weapons. That symbolic gesture of holding the meeting in Hiroshima on April 11-12, 2014 received added value as the ministers listened to the stories of atomic bomb survivors before starting their formal discussion.

The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) is a coalition of states that came into being in 2010 with the aim of leading the international efforts in nuclear disarmament.

Composed of Australia, Canada, Chile, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, the NPDI, through its regular meetings and declarations and statements, focuses on ways to accelerate the process of nuclear disarmament. The Hiroshima conference was the eighth NPDI meeting since the group was formed.

All of it sounds pretty good

Prior to the start of the Hiroshima conference, Fumio Kishida, the Japanese Foreign Minister, published an opinion article in the Wall Street Journal Asia where he stressed the importance of adopting a multilateral approach to nuclear disarmament and also outlined the priorities that the global community needs to work out for achieving the desired goal of a nuclear free world. He expressed concern over North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs and reiterated Japan’s commitment in tackling the Iranian nuclear issue.

Japanese Foreign Minister also did not fail to mention about the lessons his country had learned from the accident at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station in March 2011. Since nuclear power generation is an issue linked closely to nuclear safety, Kishida pledged Japan’s continued support for countries that are building up their capacities in the field of nuclear security, and vowed to share the lessons learned from Fukushima nuclear accident.

The Hiroshima conference touched upon most of the issues that the Japanese foreign minister raised in his Wall Street Journal article and a joint statement issued at the end of the meeting outlined the priorities and actions that the global community needs to take for fostering further momentum for achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. The statement underlined the need of extending forever the nearly 69 years record of non-use of nuclear weapons and encouraged all states to contribute actively and constructively to pursue practical and effective measures that will strengthen the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime based on NPT.

While condemning strongly North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs by mentioning that they “undermine NPT and the global non-proliferation regime as well as pose a great threat to regional and global peace and stability”, the statement also welcomed the start of the implementation in Iran of the first-steps under the Joint Plan of Action and expressed hope that the on-going negotiations with the country will lead to the final and comprehensive resolution of Iran’s nuclear issue. It further said that to remove international concerns regarding Iran’s nuclear activities, Iran needs to implement swiftly and steadily measures such as the ratification, and implementation of its Additional Protocol.

The NPDI member states also recognized the importance of the role played by the civil society and underlined the need to enhance disarmament and non-proliferation education. The joint statement welcomed the opportunity to engage with civil society, including NGOs, students, academics and the media.
The loopholes

However, the International Campaign to abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which is a coalition of NGOs and civil society organizations advocating for the abolition of nuclear weapons, expressed disappointment with the outcome of Hiroshima meeting. In a statement issued immediately after the ministerial meeting, ICAN pointed out that “the foreign ministers were unable to agree that the world needs to close the legal loopholes on weapons of mass destruction, and outlaw nuclear weapons.”

ICAN is strongly in favor of starting a negotiation process that would lead to a framework for a legal prohibition of nuclear weapons and the organisation feels that an absence of any binding prohibition would not bring any tangible outcome.

The anti-nuclear group suggests that a legal prohibition “would fulfill and strengthen the NPT and create conditions for disarmament by establishing a clear room against possession of nuclear weapons; challenge the assertion that nuclear weapons provide security; and provide a strong moral incentive for nuclear possessor States to eliminate their arsenals; and reinforce non-proliferation efforts worldwide.”

The group has also pointed out a few conflicting positions on nuclear issues being pursued by the 12 NPDI states. As seven of the twelve NPDI governments rely on nuclear weapons in their security strategies, ICAN feels that they bear a particular responsibility in removing the threat to the world posed by nuclear weapons.

A more convincing step taken by those governments would rationally be the one that would first address the conflicting position by revising their security strategies to bring them in line with the NPDI’s declared position on nuclear weapons.

Moreover, Japan and Australia, the two leading countries of the NPDI, are also taking a number of steps that run contrary to what NPDI policy statements are calling for. Japan now looks set for continuing the process that would result in accumulating large quantities of weapons-grade plutonium; and Australia sells uranium, the raw material for nuclear weapons, to all the NPT nuclear weapons states.

Which way to go now?

Despite such criticisms and drawbacks; discussions that had taken place at the Hiroshima meeting clearly point out the significance of such initiatives at a time when the community of nations is getting ready for the next round of NPT Review Conference in 2015.

As the Hiroshima joint statement rightfully mentions that with the 2015 NPT Review Conference fast approaching, it is necessary that all the state parties fully comply with the obligations and commitments, particularly with the full and prompt implementation of all the actions in the 2010 Action Plan.

It should be noted that the nuclear-weapons states made an unequivocal undertaking in the 2000 NPT Review Conference to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, a pledge that was reconfirmed at the 2010 conference. However, the world has moved no further in achieving that long cherished desire of the majority of human beings.

“Declarations and statements being issued periodically by the NPDI concerning the pace of NPT negotiations and the need to move swiftly on non-proliferation and disarmament reminds us not only of the necessity of taking steps towards the right direction, but also warns us of the serious consequences the global community might face in case we fail to take timely action,” noted an informed observer.

“So, to end with, we can once again go back to what the Japanese foreign minister said in his Wall Street Journal article, which is: ‘increased cooperation, transparency, rule of law and other cornerstones of 21st century diplomacy led global stockpiles (of nuclear weapons) to fall around 17,000 (from the Cold War era height of 70,000). While this is a significant decrease, our progress must not stop there’. [IDN-InDepthNews – April 17, 2014]”

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*Monzurul Huq is a Bangladesh journalist, who has authored three books in Bengali on Japan and other subjects. He moved to Japan in 1994 after working at the United Nations Information Center in Dhaka and BBC World Service in London. He represents two leading national dailies of Bangladesh – Prothom Alo and the Daily Star – and contributes regularly to a number of other important publications in Bangladesh. He has written extensively both in English and Bengali on matters related to Japan and East Asia. He is also a visiting professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Yokohama National University and Keisen University, teaching subjects related to Japanese politics, Japanese media, the developing world and world affairs. He also works as a radio broadcaster for NHK. A member of the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan since 2000, he has served at the Board of Directors of the Club for two consecutive terms before being elected president of the Club.

Photo on page 13: Hiroshima lanterns | Credit: ICAN; Bottom Photo: ICAN
NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Remembering Hiroshima and Our Common Future

By Monzurul Huq

TOKYO (IDN) - Human memory is short, particularly when it comes to record war and destruction. Countless details of various times portraying the accounts of misery and human suffering probably remind us of something vague and abstract; something distant and detached, not at all related to the realities that we face at any given time. Since what is seen as vague or blurred hardly serves as solid evidence, and what is distant hardly seems inspiring for stirring our conscience to the level of awakening, we tend to forget about what war and destruction brings to mankind soon after the waves of tragic realities subside and pave the way for a relative tranquil setting, at least for a short time.

This fragile nature of our memory is what plays always at the hands of those who tend to take us back to the point where erasing the memory for the sake of so called greater group interest becomes easier and we turn back the wheels of progress for a journey taking the reverse course. This is why war and subsequent self-destruction has become part of human being’s eternal journey in quest of a peaceful and tranquil life.

The real causes for much of such failures might be traced back in our inability to grasp the depth of human sufferings that war always brings. And as long as we continue ignoring the fathom of that depth, turning swords into ploughshares will always remain a deferred dream, elusive ever for us to reach anywhere closer.

And here, once again, memory can play a very important role; a role that would help us, at least in real terms, to grasp the depth of tragedy that war might bring at a time when our destructive capabilities by far supersede anything that we can think about.

And it is precisely from this understanding that the fourteen survivors of Hiroshima atomic bombing in August 6, 1945, make a heroic contribution by knocking at our conscience through the recollection and recounting of memories of their innocent adolescent years, which were torn apart by the hellfire unleashed on that fateful morning.

A Silence Broken

“Hiroshima - A Silence Broken” is a timely publication launched in March this year, well ahead of the 70th anniversary of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The genre of the book is oral history that tells the stories of fourteen Atomic bomb survivors of Hiroshima who were born between the years 1927 and 1939. All of them survived the horrors of the aftermath of atomic bombing and eventually lived a long life, although bearing the severe wounds, both in body and in their mind.

The road ahead of them had not been a paved one as they had to undergo life-long medical treatment that in most of the cases was successful in healing the wounds they suffered. However, the tacit discriminatory attitude that many of the survivors had to encounter in the society was probably more painful than the physical suffering and deep in their minds the scars remained painful for very long.

The period immediately after the bombing was for Japan a time of confusion and also a time of disarray. In the chaotic post-war period, recalling the nightmarish experiences of A-bomb survivors became a taboo as Japan came under occupation and victors naturally were not happy about disclosing the evil acts of their own. Moreover, the deadly scars and deformed body shape that many of them had to live with also caused complexity in their mind and they gradually started keeping shut the doors of those bad memories.

Many remained silent about the experiences they had to go through for being at a closer proximity of epicenters. But fortunately for the world, a significant number of survivors later decided to break the silence and come forward with their distinct narratives. Each of the fourteen stories told in “Hiroshima - A Silence Broken” are unique in nature, as the extent of real sufferings of the survivors had never been the same.

A burned woman, a dead child and an orphan

Tadashi Kihara remembers vividly a tragic scene that had been haunting him ever since he encountered it soon after the bombing. Though he was injured by the bombing, he continued helping the search work for trapped and badly injured people around Hiroshima. During one of those nightly search missions he heard a crying voice begging for water. The voice was feeble but intense. Getting closer what he saw was a badly burned woman holding a baby in her arms. She had serious burns all over her body and the baby was holding mother’s nipple on its lips.

A closer look exposed the reality more vividly and Kihara could sense that the baby was already dead and it was probably mother’s refusal to accept the reality that she kept holding the dead baby as if she was still feeding the child with mother’s milk. Here is how Kihara tells us of his own reflection, “There was nothing I could do for her. I put my hands together and apologized, and walked away. This still causes pain in my heart.”

During his younger days Kihara was hiding the fact that he was an atomic bomb survivor. But after turning 65, he changed his mind and decided to tell his story to the future generations.
What he wants now is not to let the young forget about the horrible experiences that once caused a badly wounded mother to hold her dead child closer to her burnt body and beg for water. Kihara must be feeling a sense of relief that the scene causing pain deep in his heart for so many years he could at last expose to others with the hope that no mother anywhere in this world ever have to experience anything like that.

All those fourteen survivors telling their stories in the latest collection were boys in their teens with full of vigor and energy. The atomic bomb not only shattered their dreams of a brighter future, but also changed their lives in a way that none could ever think about, even in their nightmares.

Much appealing is the story of Shoso Kawamoto, who came to know he had become an A-bomb orphan on his return to Hiroshima in search of his parents three days after the bombing. For 11-year old Kawamoto the only shelter he could find was in a temple that offered free food, but not enough to fill-up his hungry stomach. He later became a street orphan, struggling hard for mere survival, sometime by stealing rice cakes from street vendors, sometime working for gangsters groups systematically exploiting street children at the time.

He regrets that not much has been told about those doubly disadvantaged victims of Hiroshima bombing, who after becoming orphans had to go through extreme difficulties. His narrative also informs us that before the bombing, about 8,600 elementary school students in Hiroshima were evacuated to the countryside. Of those 2,700 became orphans. Out of these only 700 were fortunate enough to find places at orphanages and the rest were left abandoned to become street children.

**The new horror**

What binds all these fourteen survivors is not only their common suffering but also their self imposed isolation for quite long that kept them silent about telling others the horrors they had gone through. What prompted them to come forward and break the silence is the new horror that they have witnessed unleashing after the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March 2011. Since then they have taken it as their solemn responsibility to tell people about the extent of damage that nuclear fallout can cause.

Katsuyuki Shimoi is a survivor who tells us how watching Fukushima workers on a TV program reminded him of what happened to his brother a few days after the bombing and thus prompting him to tell his side of the story of survival and death after the radiation. His younger brother Akio was only 13 and was in a street car at the time of bombing along with his friend Nakamura. The car was completely destroyed, however, both survived and returned home. Here is what he tells us about what happened next: “After about 20 days, my brother’s hair started falling out and red spots appeared all over his body...His shoulder and arms got thinner and thinner until they were like chopsticks...My brother was only 13, but he looked like an old man when he passed away. I later heard that his friend Nakamura passed away on the same day.”

It was more than 65 years after that, seeing a worker in the Fukushima nuclear power plant on TV Shimoi he thought he saw a rash on the worker’s arms, the same kind of rash that caused his brother so much pain leading to his death. It made him shudder and prompted him to break his silence.

Recording the testaments of A-bomb survivors is a timely initiative taken by Soka Gakkai Hiroshima Peace Conference. The Conference believes that the end to the nuclear age will not come unless strong public opinion is mobilized for gaining support for nuclear abolition. “Hiroshima – A Silence Broken” is the eighth volume of the collection of Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors’ testimonies over the years and first to be published after the Fukushima disaster.

Soka Gakkai Hiroshima Peace Conference has decided to publish the latest volume in English translation as well for making the voices of atomic bomb survivors widely heard outside Japan too. And as the world is getting ready to mark the seventieth anniversary of that deadly man-made disaster in a year’s time, this makes it a timely publication reminding us not only of the horrors of the past, but also of the path that we need to take to stop forever the deadly race leading to our common destruction.

[IDN-InDepthNews – June 30, 2014]
From Mubarak To Al-Sisi Via Tahrir Square

By Jayantha Dhanapala*

KANDY, Sri Lanka (IDN) - In marked contrast to the vibrant exercise of democracy in India last month, a military coup toppled a controversial but democratically elected government in Thailand – an Asian Buddhist country with which Sri Lanka has ancient bonds and shared traditions. Worse still an election was held from May 26-28 in Egypt – a founder member of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) – resulting in recently retired Army Commander Abdul Fattah al-Sisi securing an incredible fairy-tale 96.9% of the vote in which only 47.45% of the voters cast their vote.

This column wrote in an analysis of the July 3, 2013 coup, which deposed the democratically elected Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood: “Much now depends on the interim Government and their ability to pave the way for fresh elections when a genuinely representative Government will emerge. The Muslim Brotherhood must also change and settle for a compromise and for reconciliation in the larger interests of the stability and prosperity of Egypt and her people.”

Nothing of the sort happened. The betrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the predominantly youthful protesters at Tahrir Square is now complete. Financed by the monarchies of Saudi Arabia, and others in the Gulf with medieval mindsets, to the tune of an estimated US $12 billion, and secretly encouraged by the Islamo-phobic US (despite its opportunist alliance with Al Qaeda in Syria) and the EU, ex-Presidents Mubarak and Morsi were allowed to languish in jail while the new strongman al-Sisi consolidated his position.

Stability was the watchword as the Army stole the clothes of the revolutionaries pledging “freedom” and “social justice” – the slogans of the 2011 revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood was banned and 528 of its members sentenced to death. US-based Democracy International and the European Union’s Election Observation Mission, who were among the election monitors, released preliminary reports that criticized the current political climate and its impact on the outcome of the election. President Carter was more direct in saying "I am gravely concerned that Egypt's democratic transition has faltered."

All the while Israel has remained the winner as the Arab world continues to self-destruct. Now the only positive sign of Palestinian resistance to the systematic consolidation of occupied Palestinian territory with daily evictions of Palestinians and the construction of Israeli settlements is the unity government between Hamas and Al Fatah grudgingly accepted even by the US. Isolated, Israel has mounted a fierce opposition to this and rejected all talks on Palestine. The tragedy is that the only country that could have provided credible leadership for the Arabs to support the Palestinians was Egypt. That opportunity is lost for the moment as Egypt tries to refurbish her credentials.

After his election victory, Sisi tried to reaffirm his democratic intentions severing his connections with past military dictatorships. He said: "We know that some people fear a return to the past, but this will not happen, there is no going back and we will move forward." Since Tahrir Square was the vortex of the aspirations of Egypt's youth it is relevant to cite the 2010 Human Development Report of the UNDP on Youth in Egypt. According to that Report, Egypt's youth can be a formidable force for development if conditions are put in place for an inclusive society where all young Egyptians feel valued and are afforded opportunities to learn well, find decent work, have a voice, engage productively in the community, afford marriage, and establish their own homes. That is unlikely to happen with al-Sisi.

Restrictive political and legal context

The US-based Carter Centre, in a report issued recently, expressed concerns about "the restrictive political and legal context surrounding Egypt's electoral process, the lack of a genuinely competitive campaign environment, and the deep political polarization that threatens the country's transition". That context is highlighted by the trial of three Al Jazeera English journalists – Baher Mohamed, Peter Greste and Mohammed Fahmy – who have been imprisoned since December 2013 on charges of broadcasting false news and providing a platform to the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. An international campaign is on to secure their release. Al Jazeera is the widely influential Qatar based TV network and the prosecution of the journalists must be viewed in the context of the Saudi-Qatar rivalry in the Middle East.

It is understandable that Egypt's current leaders do not want the religious extremism of the Muslim Brotherhood especially with minorities like the Coptic Christians who comprise 10% of the population. However policies of repression will not help especially in the declining economic conditions the country faces. It will also affect the international initiatives that depended on Egypt for leadership.
The NAM, the G77 and non nuclear weapon states in the NPT regime are crying for leadership at this juncture of international affairs. Modi of India alone cannot fill the vacuum of leadership in the Global South. Samir Amin, distinguished Egyptian economist and author of the “centre-periphery” thesis who heads an African think-tank in Dakar, Senegal, recently wrote imploring the NAM to reinvent itself.

Drawing lessons from the past he wrote: “We have the right to choose our own path of development. The powers that were and are the beneficiaries of the existing order should accept to adjust themselves to the requirements of our development. The adjustment must be mutual, not unilateral. That is, it is not the weak who have to adjust to the strong, but rather the strong need to adjust to the needs of the weak…. We reject the tenets of globalization that are currently in place.”

In the context of disarmament Egypt led the charge in 2010 which helped NAM to achieve a strong Final Declaration at the NPT Review Conference emphasizing the need for progress in the Middle East as a Weapons of Mass destruction free Zone.
With the next conference due in 2015 the NAM are leaderless to protest over inaction on this issue caused by Israeli obstructionism.

[IDN-InDepthNews – June 7, 2014] ✤

“Much now depends on the interim Government and their ability to pave the way for fresh elections when a genuinely representative Government will emerge. The Muslim Brotherhood must also change and settle for a compromise and for reconciliation in the larger interests of the stability and prosperity of Egypt and her people.”

*Jayantha Dhanapala is currently President of the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize recipient the Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs, a former UN Under-Secretary-General and a former Ambassador of Sri Lanka.

Photo above: Tahrir Square Protests. Credit: Google Imagine
The Saga of German Weapons for the Arab World

By Julio Godoy*

BERLIN (IDN) - Once a year, the German government reports the amounts of weapons the country’s military industry exported to the world during the previous 12 months. Once a year, German society pretends to be scandalised by the numbers and particularly the recipients of the weapons. Once a year, the German government explains why the military exports are important for the country (jobs, jobs, jobs!) and why the importing regimes, many of them undemocratic, should continue benefiting from the German high tech weapons. And never something changes.

On June 11, 2014, it happened again. Under pressure from the opposition in parliament, the German coalition government led by the Christian Democratic chancellor Angela Merkel admitted that the country’s military exports in 2013 had grown again, this time by 25 percent compared to the year before. The government was also constrained to reveal that most of the weapons were exported to Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Qatar, Pakistan, and Israel.

As always, there were some expressions of regret (even the most conservative newspaper in the country, Die Welt, which always applauds whatever chancellor Merkel does, called the destination of the weapons ‘shocking’. Sigmar Gabriel, minister for economic affairs (he is also leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), in charge of authorising military exports, announced that in the future such permits shall be managed in a more stringent way.

Such a pious statement we have heard before.

Fourteen years ago, the German government, already a mighty military exporter, set high moral limits for such businesses. In the year 2000, the SPD government of the time, of which Gabriel was minister, approved its so called “Political Principles”, according to which Berlin would manage the military exports in a “restrictive and responsible” way, as the statement put it, and would not authorise the selling of weapons to regimes that violate human rights, or in areas of conflict.

These principles were quite a delayed reaction to scandals linked to military exports, such as the export of submarines to apartheid South Africa in the mid-1980s, and similar, nuclear-capable vessels to Israel.

But, even as of today, you can assess what these political principles are worth. Since years, Germany has been selling weapons, from frigates to armoured tanks to small weapons, to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Algeria. Since years, the German government insists that such exports conform to the political principles, because, for instance, “Saudi Arabia is an anchor of stability” in the Middle East.

Chancellor Merkel has repeatedly said so over her nine years of government. In Dec 2012, Germany was at the time about to export armoured tanks to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Merkel said her government maintained “a strategic relationship” with the Saudi monarchy, and argued that Iran constituted a "major threat" for the Saudis, who, so the conc

Saudi Arabia an “anchor of stability”? Saudi Arabia a democratic regime? Saudi Arabia an adherent to human rights? The Arab world a region without crisis? Actually, Saudi Arabia supports terrorist groups in Iraq, in Syria, in Libya, and, as recently as 2011, helped to crush the democratic demands in countries such as Bahrain and Yemen. But Merkel would say: ‘We don’t care!’

In Syria and Iraq

The gravity of the German military exports can be at its full extent seen in Syria and Iraq. Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, the German (and by extension, practically all NATO countries) supported one way or another the opposition to Bashar Hafez al-Assad, despite evidence that it was supported and armed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the Sunni powers in the region. ☞
It wouldn’t be a surprise if one were to find German-made weapons, originally exported to the Saudis and Qataris, in the hands of the so-called Syrian rebels.

That German and NATO support for the insurrection in Syria only started to flinch when the nature of the most important and best armed factions of the rebels became clear: Sunni warriors representing the most intransigent Islam faction, the Wahhabism.

By then it was too late, for the civil population in Syria anyway. But the civil population was never the concern of the military exporters.

Something similar has been happening in Iraq since years. Sunni military factions do not recognise the Shia and Kurdish-dominated, internationally recognised government, and, with the little help of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, keep the bloodshed going.

The most important of these factions is without doubt the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a most brutal militia army, which aims at redesigning the national borders of the region, to create a Sunni state that would encompass parts or the whole of Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

By its own accounts, the ISIS has been committing all kind of atrocities in the region, including mass executions.

ISIS recent march towards Baghdad has finally alarmed most governments, including the leading NATO members, and has triggered consultations between Washington, the European capitals, and even their former enemies, the Shia-ruled Iran and Syria, on how to stop the ISI offensive once and for all.

It would be an absurd corollary to the German military exports to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, if the NATO is forced into an alliance with the Shia powers in the Middle East to rescue Iraq from falling into the hands of Sunni zealots, armed, precisely, with weapons made in Germany.

It is also a new evidence of the cruel irony of history that 12 years after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq started, and 11 years after George W. Bush claimed that the U.S. “mission” there had been accomplished, and after hundreds of thousands have been killed there under the most horrifying circumstances, Western military powers are again considering invading or at least bombing Mesopotamia from the air. [IDN-InDepthNews – June 18, 2014]

*Julio Godoy is an investigative journalist and IDN Global Editor. He has won international recognition for his work, including the Hellman-Hammett human rights award, the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Investigative Reporting Online by the U.S. Society of Professional Journalists, and the Online Journalism Award for Enterprise Journalism by the Online News Association and the U.S.C. Annenberg School for Communication, as co-author of the investigative reports “Making a Killing: The Business of War” and “The Water Barons: The Privatisation of Water Services”.

Photos above: Google Imagine
AFRICA

Need to Foster Stabilization in CAR

By Misha Boutilier*

TORONTO (IDN) - The Central African Republic (CAR) is in the throes of an extreme political crisis that exploded in early December 2013 with mass killing in the streets of the capital Bangui. Despite a French military intervention under UN auspices, an increase in aid funding for the CAR, and the accession of a new president committed to national reconciliation, the situation is still dire.

UN officials warn that there is a “high risk of crimes against humanity and genocide,” and the French Ambassador to the UN Gerard Araud has emphasized that the 6,000 peacekeepers currently deployed are insufficient to quell violence between Muslim Seleka fighters and Christian anti-balaka militias.

Given these events, it is perhaps time to revisit the idea that the CAR is a success story for conflict prevention. Some writers, most notably Hayes Brown of the popular liberal news platform Think Progress, have celebrated the rapid international response to the surge of violence in early December.

According to Brown, President Obama’s Presidential Study Directive-10 on atrocity prevention and the creation of the Atrocity Prevention Board to coordinate interagency responses allowed the United States to lead a masterful conflict prevention effort.

Thus, Brown credited the international community for learning the lessons of Rwanda and moving quickly to prevent genocide in the CAR, in sharp contrast to its inaction in Rwanda in 1994.

Certainly, the international response to atrocities in the CAR has been far superior to the total inaction during the Rwandan genocide that now US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power detailed so brilliantly. Still, this analogy in fact serves to mask the reality that the international response in the CAR has been too late and insufficient.

Only compared to the Rwandan genocide is it possible to label the international response a success story in a country where nearly half the population have difficulty finding food, one fifth are displaced, security has fully collapsed, and ethno-religious tensions have dangerously risen.

Scant attention

In fact, the international community paid scant attention to the deteriorating security situation in the CAR from the Seleka takeover in January 2013 until December 2013. While the Security Council did meet to consider the crisis several times, it largely failed to take decisive action.

Meanwhile, then-President Michel Djotodia was unable to control his Seleka rebel fighters, who rampaged throughout the country raping, killing, and pillaging. While arms exports from the United Kingdom and elsewhere flooded the country, hardly any states contributed to a fund to complete the disarmament process.

As a result, state institutions and health and education infrastructure collapsed, the agricultural sector broke down, and hundreds of thousands fled their homes. In July 2013, Medecins Sans-Frontiers even warned that the CAR had been “abandoned to its fate.”

Moreover, even the much-celebrated international response in December has fallen short in several areas. French President Francois Hollande deserves great credit for contributing 1,600 French troops, which together with 4,000 African Union peacekeepers has made some progress, but it is evident that they have been unable to restore security to the vast expanses of the CAR.

Despite their best efforts, peacekeepers have proven unable to quell the sectarian violence by anti-balaka militias against Muslim civilians as Seleka rebels withdraw. In remote areas of the country, anti-balaka lynch mobs have driven tens of thousands of Muslims to flee.

Moreover, peacekeepers are unable to ensure food deliveries, as evidenced by a World Food Program convoy escorted by African peacekeepers that was blocked by militia groups and forced to turn back. Recently, the EU offered 500-600 troops to secure the airport of the capital Bangui, but this still falls short of the 10,000 peacekeepers that Ambassador Araud said were the bare minimum. ☛
Certainly, the picture in the CAR is not all negative. President Catherine Samba-Panza promises to pursue reconciliation, and the country’s top religious leaders Archbishop Nzapalainga and Imam Kobine are working hard to promote the peace process. In addition, the UN Security Council has continued to stay engaged, and on January 28 authorized the EU force and imposed targeted sanctions on atrocity perpetrators. UN officials and leading NGOs also deserve credit for mobilizing the fear of genocide and “never again” rhetoric to spur a rapid international response in December.

[IDN-InDepthNews – February 9, 2014]

*Misha Boutilier is Junior Research Fellow at Atlantic Council of Canada in Toronto. This article was originally published on Geopoliticalmonitor.com on February 5, with the headline The Jury Is Still Out on Conflict Prevention in the CAR. It is being reproduced by arrangement with them.*

*Photo on page 21: geopoliticalmonitor | Photos above: Google Imagine*
Thailand – Towards A Better Model of Democracy?

By Kalinga Seneviratne

The demonstrators have been calling for the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to be replaced by an unelected Peoples’ Council to redraw the constitution to stamp out money-politics in the Thai electoral system. Finally the military seem to have come to their aid, and put democracy to the test.

“Why the media think election is so important - North Korea has elections, China also has elections - why is it so fixed about an unelected body?” asked Thai political scientist Dr Termsek Cha-lermpalanupap in response to a question I posed to him about Thai anti-government protestors’ demands for an “undemocratic” path to political reforms.

“Winning elections is not the only important point of democracy, a more important part is how elected representatives use their power in the House (parliament) and in the Senate to serve national and public interest” he added.

He spoke a few days before the Thai army moved in to overthrow the government of Pheu Thai Party that was set up by one of Thailand’s richest men and former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. He was himself overthrown by a military coup in 2006 and subsequently charged and convicted for corruption. He lives in Dubai to avoid serving a 2-year jail term in Thailand. Since plunging into politics in the 1990s, the former Telecom tycoon and billionaire businessman has been a controversial figure in Thai politics. Some even call him a divisive figure who manipulates the one-man-one-vote democratic system to buy the support of the rural poor - who form 70 percent of the Thai electorate. He has won one election after another and now for the second time, his party has been overthrown by a military coup.

Speaking on South Korea’s English-language regional satellite channel Arirang in November, Thaksin explained that what he did to Thai politics was to provide a way to empower Thailand’s poor farmers in particular.

“When I started my new party I went to rural areas. Old farmers came to me and asked please be PM for the poor. It really touched me. They wanted someone to look after them. They have no hopes in life,” he explained.

“One thing they need is access to capital… I set up the village fund different than microfinance. You give money to the villages and let them set up the committee to manage… people don’t need a lot of money they need about 200 dollars so that they can send their children to school, grow chicken, sell to the market.”

This scheme came to be known as Thaksinomics. “They need opportunities, they need access to knowledge, to information, to government services, to capital … I use this door track policy for rural economy and second track is export.”
“I export by helping the farmers to get a better price. I’m their salesman.” This was how Thaksin saw his role as a politician and businessman.

But, for his opponents this was corruption. He used the rural people to buy votes from populist policies and in return he designed the political system to benefit his family businesses and that of his business cronies.

“Thaksin regime says they are protecting what they call democracy – running for elections, get the majority and run the country whichever way they please, because they won. PDRC is fighting for a better democracy,” argues Dr Somkiat Onwimon, a former Senator, academic and TV host, who took to the stage at PDRC rallies calling for the overthrow of the elected government.

“Buying votes from voters that is only one simple form of corruption, but, Thaksin regime kind of corruption is more complicated than that,” he said in an interview given to me in April. “Once you are in power you change the law to be in your favour, so that you can buy and sell state enterprises, invest in new infrastructure projects ... it’s not actual corruption which can be caught by the law. It is a kind of corruption because they have the power to change the law (to make it legal).”

One example he pointed out was how in 2006, while being the Prime Minister, Thaksin changed the foreign ownership laws from 25 percent to 49 percent so that he could sell his family business Shin Corp telecom network to Singapore’s Temasak Holdings and make a huge profit out of it. This was the trigger for the army coup of September 2006 that ousted his government.

The trigger for the latest coup was an amnesty bill, moved by the government of Prime Minister Yinluck Shinawatra (Thaksin’s sister) last year. Thailand’s anti-corruption movement gathered steam in September 2013, when the ruling Phue Thai Party tried to push through parliament a blanket amnesty bill that would have absolved politicians convicted of corruption and serious crimes linked with political conflicts since 2004.

The government dressed it up as a bill of reconciliation and creating unity in the country after years of fierce political battles between the urban “yellows shirts” that represent the traditional power elites of Bangkok and the “red shirts” the rural electors mainly from the northeast of the country that firmly supports the Shinawatra regime.

Though the amnesty would have covered all sides of politics, it was widely seen in Thailand as a bill designed to allow Thaksin Shinawatra to come back to the country a free man.

“It has become a nation-wide protest movement of the woken silent Thai majority against money politics as exemplified by Thaksin,” argues Dr Termsak, who has worked with the ASEAN Secretariat for 20 years, before retiring in 2012.

Non-elected Peoples’ Council

The PDRC is advocating setting up a non-elected Peoples’ Council that represents various sectors of the Thai community to draft a new constitution over a period of 18 to 24 months that would have strong checks and balances to stem political corruption.

“In America they have mafia organized crime, but here in Thailand we have organized corruption by those who are in power. Spending a little bit money getting votes and for next 4 years they can make a lot more money,” notes Dr Somkiat. “There is no way you can get rid of this system except that you get rid of the whole system by revolution.”

Dr Termsak argues, democracy and elected parliaments are not the answer to eradicating corruption. “We need non-politicians to improve the political system, examine the election law, even the constitution, try to plug all the loopholes so there’s no return of money politics.”

This is what Thai protestors are calling for – a non-elected “Peoples Council” - consisting of people of integrity from the community. They do not seem to believe that multiparty democracy can solve the problem.

Dr Somkiat believes that this process would take between 18 to 24 months. He argues that Article 7 of the Thai constitution allows a traditional way of conflict resolution, where or whenever the constitution is unable to provide a solution. Interestingly, the army says that they have not abolished the constitution but suspended it.

But, the Assembly for the Defense of Democracy, a group of academics aligned with the Red Shirts movement in a statement published by the Thai social media website Prachatai argues that such reform cannot possibly be achieved simply by listening to just one group of people who have taken to the streets.

“A reform must begin by responding to the needs of diverse groups of people and advance on the basis of an inclusive and equal partnership, without which a reform will merely serve as an excuse for the elites to grab power and hold on to their own vested interests.”

While the military seem to have consolidated their power in the country with the arrest of both members of the Phue Thai Party government, red shirt leaders and PDRC protest leaders, the coming days will be interesting to watch how the scenario of an unelected “Peoples Council” to reform the Thai political system is unveiled. Would the Thais provide a better model of democracy or go back to the old ways of rule by military juntas?

[IDN-InDepthNews – May 25, 2014] ★

Read Kalinga Seneviratne’s other articles in Internet:

TOWARD A WORLD WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

2014 Report of the Joint Media Project


TOWARD A WORLD WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

2013 Report of the Joint Media Project

Dismantling Obsolete Missiles in South Asia

By Saima Abdullah and Abish Jyoti Mitra

South Asia has a history of protracted conflict, arms buildup, anddecoupled dialogue leading to an atmosphere of mistrust and strategic anxiety. The geographical proximity of India and Pakistan increases the risk of an inadvertent catastrophic escalation due to miscommunication, false alarm or accident. A group of young security analysts, which we were part of, met in Sofia, Bulgaria to explore new ideas for confidence building measures (CBMs) supported by Brigadiers (retired) Pervez Hassan Khan, from Pakistan, and Gaurmeet Kaurwali from India and members of the Colombo Plan Conference Building Process Group.

Read more

NATO Supplies: Endgame

By Anurag Tripathi

Research Associate, Institute for Conflict Management

As the US drawdown in Afghanistan approaches its culmination, Pakistan continues to exhaust all it can from a reluctant alliance in the War against Terror, leveraging its strategic location to a maximum. Nevertheless, the strategy appears to be approaching its natural limits. And, on December 5, 2013, the United States (US) Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, during his meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Rehman Sharif, reportedly warned Pakistan that, if it failed to secure the supply routes to and from Afghanistan, the US Congress may withhold military aid to Pakistan. An unnamed US defense official stated, "The Secretary made the point that we need to demonstrate the continued flow of goods in order to be able to continue fulfilling their reimbursements."

Read more

No More US Boots At Afghan Doorsteps?

By Ismail Salami

In his refusal to sign the Afghan-US security pact which would enable some US troops to stay in Afghanistan after 2014, Afghan President Hamid Karzai is signaling a clear message to the United States: Afghanistan does not need US troops on its grounds any more.

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