

'The US will not permit nuclear

During her recent correspondence with Noam Chomsky, Shelley Wallia asked him to comment on issues concerning South Asia. Excerpts:

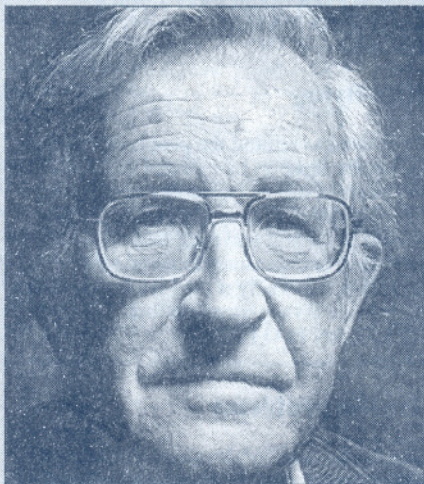
KEEPING in view Israel's secret nuclear weapons programme, don't you think that same standards should be applied to all West Asia nations, and not just to Iran.

Certainly. Recall that the major UN resolution on Iraq to which the US and UK appeal, Resolution 687 of April 1991, calls for "establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery". The US has repeatedly made similar commitments, but of course does not abide by them, and has now also violated them in the case of India. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that the Non-Proliferation Treaty commits all nuclear states to undertake "good faith" efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons. That was a core part of the initial bargain. That is a binding legal commitment, as the World Court ruled a decade ago. None of the nuclear states has abided by that commitment, but the US is far in the lead in rejecting it, and has even declared, under Bush, that it is not bound by it.

Why not have nuclear disarmament in West Asia. Is it possible? What about Israel?

Because the US will not permit it. That holds more generally. It is widely recognised among strategic analysts that unless production of weapons-grade fissile materials is controlled, the

fate of the species is very much in doubt. There are sensible proposals as to how to deal with this problem: the proposal of Mohammed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, to place production of fissile materials in the hands of an international agency, to which states could apply for legitimate uses; and the



Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FISSBAN) called for in a UN resolution of 1993. The US would never accept ElBaradei's proposal. In fact, the only state to have accepted it, to my knowledge, is Iran, in February 2006 (unreported in the Western press, to my knowledge).

As for FISSBAN, despite strong US objec-

tions it did come to a vote at the UN in November 2004. It passed 174-1, with two abstentions: Israel, which is reflexive, and Britain, which is more interesting. The British ambassador explained at the UN session that Britain favoured a FISSBAN, but this version "divided the international community": 174-1. For Blair's Britain, it is apparently more important to heed the master's voice than for the human species to survive.

Could you give your reactions to the

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recent nuclear treaty signed between India and the US? Obviously, India is being wooed to counterbalance the rise of China.

India faces some important choices. It has made some steps towards closer relations with China, but is also tempted by the prospects of joining Britain in its role as a "spear-carrier for the pax Americana", as Blair's Britain is described in the journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. China and Russia are the

ear disarmament in West Asia'

core of the Asian Energy Security Grid and the Shanghai Cooperation Council (which includes the states of Central Asia). Very likely South Korea will join (perhaps it already has), probably the Southeast Asian states.

India's decision will be very significant. US concerns certainly include markets and raw materials, but state interests go well beyond. The US could gain access to Iranian energy resources and markets if it chose, but it is more important to punish Iran for defying Washington in 1979

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by overthrowing the tyrant that the US and UK had installed when they destroyed Iran's parliamentary system. Such "successful defiance", as it is described in the internal record, cannot be tolerated, just as it cannot be tolerated by the Mafia, to which international affairs bears an uncomfortable resemblance. It is possible that sooner or later Japan and China (the leading lenders to the US), and others, might switch to a basket of currencies, primarily the Euro, and that energy producers might do so as well.

The effects on the US economy, and the global economy, could be substantial.

In the wake of the Latin American Left forming an alliance against American unilateralism, the Bush administration now is seeking to fashion a new balance of power in Asia. What are your views on this aspect of the US foreign policy?

Washington is, no doubt, deeply concerned by the developments in South America, which, for the first time since the Spanish conquests, is not only moving towards greater independence but is also integrating, at least to some extent. But I do not think this is the prime motive for US efforts to improve its strategic-economic position in Asia, to counterbalance China. That would have proceeded in about the same way, I suspect, even if Latin America remained under control.

With the ongoing violence and the war against terrorism, which has resulted in terrible bloodshed in Afghanistan and now in Iraq, I see long-term economic and political threats facing the US resulting in fear and mistrust. In this context is it not a strange and frightening world that seems to be taking shape?

I quite agree. The element of paranoid fear is very old. There is a very good study of these matters in popular American literature, from the earliest days, by literary critic Bruce Franklin (War Stars) [Franklin's provocative study underscores the dialectical relationship between ideology and

the popular with its bearing on the national self-image and obsession with super-weaponry]. He finds a persistent theme: we are just about to be destroyed by evil monsters, when at the last minute we are miraculously saved by a superhero or a super weaponry. Furthermore, rather typically, the evil monsters are those we are crushing under foot: Indians, Blacks, Chinese coolies . . . Some of the examples are quite startling.

Take Jack London, a very progressive populist figure, a socialist writer. In one of his novels he calls for the extermination of the people of China by bacteriological warfare, to protect ourselves from their insidious campaign to wipe us out.

It continues to the present, and relates in complicated ways to the extremist religious fundamentalism that is also unique to the US among industrial societies. Cynical political leaders exploit these fears constantly. The Reaganites were masters of it. Every year or two the US was facing some dire threat. It didn't matter how crazy it was: Libya, Grenada, Nicaragua, Arab terrorists, crime (by implication Blacks), drugs (Hispanics) . . . Reagan himself may even have believed it; some of his performances were astonishing. It's an efficient way to mobilise people, and important when carrying out policies that are harming them.

The current administration, drawn from the same circles (often the same people), simply inherits the technique as a reflex. And paranoia combined with immense power and an extremely cynical and violent leadership is a dangerous combination, no doubt. COURTESY THE HINDU