



The World Today

Multilateralism and Effective Governance: The World Trade Organisation (WTO)

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In 1993, noted Foreign Affairs analyst, Samuel Huntington warned that the end of the Cold War would see a rise in conflicts based not on ideology, but rather on cultural identities grounded in ethnic and religious loyalties. One of the primary sources of international conflict, he indicated, would be between the West and Islam, resulting from a 'Clash of Civilizations'. Much debate has arisen from this highly controversial point of view. For some Huntington is a prophet who foresaw the current confrontation with radical Islam, while, to his critics he is a dangerous over-simplifier. There is indeed much that the 'Clash of Civilizations' does not account for, and critics will have no trouble citing events — even important ones like Iraq's invasion Kuwait — that it does not explain and would not have predicted. However, that does not make this point of view completely useless in explaining international conflict in the world today.

Of recent interest in the so called clash of civilizations debate has been the rise of HAMAS to political power and the announcement by the President of Iran, that Iran has enriched uranium. While informing the world that Iran has joined the group of these countries which have nuclear technology, he was nonetheless quick to reiterate the claim that it was for purely civil power purposes and not for weapons purposes.

Predictably, the United States did not take kindly to this news and almost immediately there was condemnation for what the US saw as Iran's attempt to develop nuclear weapons. However, if one is to examine the US response to countries with nuclear capability, some interesting observations arise. Starting right after Hiroshima, each time a country was about to obtain nuclear capability, Washington went out of its way to sound the alarm, warning of the dire consequences that would surely follow. During the Cold War era, it was the Soviet Union which, once it had succeeded in building nuclear weapons, that was supposed to make an attempt at world conquest. In the 1950s it was Britain and France that were regarded as the offenders and put under pressure. Between 1960 and 1993, first China, then Israel (albeit to a limited extent) and finally India and Pakistan were presented as the black sheep, lectured and occasionally subjected to sanctions.

However, nuclear proliferation did not make the world into a noticeably worse place — and if anything to the contrary. As Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia demonstrate, the introduction of nuclear weapons, led, if not to brotherhood and peace, then at any rate to the demise of large scale warfare between states.

Given the balance of forces, it cannot be argued that a nuclear Iran will threaten the US. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's fulminations to the contrary, the Islamic Republic will not even be a threat to Israel. The latter has long had what it needs to deter an Iranian attack. Should deterrence fail, Jerusalem can quickly turn Iran's capital Tehran, into a radioactive desert — a fact of which Iranians are fully aware. Iran's other neighbours, such as Russia, Pakistan and India can look after themselves. As it is, they seem much less alarmed by developments in Iran than by those in Washington.

Yet, the US has sought to give the impression that Iran, is on a collision course with the US arguing that Iran is a top threat to world peace and Middle East stability. Bush condemned Iran as part of an 'axis of evil' shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001, thereby heightening tensions and raising the possibility of US military action to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power.

Some foreign policy experts predict Bush might use military force to destroy Iran's nuclear programme but the current US administration has promised to pursue diplomacy first. One option is for the US to ask the United Nations Security Council to impose international sanctions on Iran. Alternatively, as was in the case of Iraq, the United States may simply decide to prevent Iran from advancing its nuclear capabilities by launching a military attack and ignoring any further dialogue or diplomacy. Yet before this is done however the US must consider some serious questions. The first one is what Iran can and will do in response to a bombing of its nuclear installations. In essence there are three possibilities: Iran can step up aid to the Iraq insurgents, strike out at the Gulf States and Israel, or send terrorists to commit acts of sabotage around the world. Secondly, the Bush administration must seriously question whether the intelligence on which its decision is based is reliable.

The fact that the Iranian government announced that it would assist HAMAS with US\$50 million, while the USA is hoping that the HAMAS would have gone bankrupt and unable to stay in power, only serves to reinforce the view that the Iranian government must be dealt with as soon as possible. The form that this may take – dialogue and diplomacy or force and military maneuvers now depends on the United Nations(UN). One hopes though, for the sake of world peace, that the United States has the patience to allow the UN, and in turn multilateralism, to operate. CARICOM has unswervingly supported the cause of multilateralism and in the same way it resented America's unilateral actions (interventions) in Haiti, Afghanistan and recently Iraq, one could expect the same kind of censure if the USA should resort to this type of action.