

North Korea's nuclear test: Impact in the Pacific region

AIR VICE MARSHAL MUMTAZ UDDIN AHMED (Retd)

THE nuclear test carried out by North Korea has evoked worldwide condemnation, as it's perceived to be a destabilizing factor in the region. It has triggered a tough UN response as the world body 'strongly condemned' Pyongyang's action at an emergency meeting and the Security Council has imposed sanctions on it. The United States, Britain, Japan, Pakistan and India and many other countries have deplored the detonation.

The situation in the Korean peninsula is a carryover from the Cold War. There are many ramifications of this North Korean venture. The political dust generated by Pyongyang's nuclear test will obviously take sometime to settle. The UN response has come swiftly which has been rejected by North Korea. Its nuclear test has certainly developed a new situation with grave implications for the world in general and Japan and South Korea in particular.

DPRK had warned the world that it would respond to increasing threats to its security by going ahead with a nuclear test. Korea-watchers all over the world were still debating if the notice was the latest ploy to force the United States to engage with President Kim Jong-Il, with a view to easing painful sanctions, when early on the morning of October 9, 2006, North Korea staked its claim to be the ninth nuclear-weapon capable power.

It was a long and tortuous journey for a country that signed the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) in 1985, withdrew from it in March 1993 and then spent more than a decade exploring terms with the US-led international community on which it would be prepared to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

Pyongyang's nuclear test has also altered the power equilibrium in the region. The emerging scenario may, therefore, provoke Japan to follow the course in order to maintain the balance in the region for the sake of its security.

Japan's new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who supports a larger military role for his country, has already said that he plans to step up cooperation with the US in the field of missile defense. He is

mindful of Japan's legitimate new role in the committee of nations since it has acquired great expertise in sophisticated and sensitive technologies besides turning into the second largest economy in the world over the past seven decades. Understandably, the humiliation of surrender as a consequence of Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear holocaust still haunts the Japanese people; the new Japanese generation genuinely feels let down since Japan's role in the world is not commensurate with its strength and capabilities. Tokyo has refrained from pursuing any major military expansion under an agreement with the US following military defeat in WW-II. Pyongyang's nuclear test has, however, changed the situation now since it has posed threat to Japan. Strong feelings are, therefore, growing in the Japanese people that Japan must expand its own military and end the taboo of developing atomic weapons itself, as North Korea's nuclear and missile program has exposed vulnerability of its security. As a matter of fact, it's quite likely that Japanese military analysts and strategists might have already started thinking on these lines when the US, animated by its anti-communist agenda, was involved in a proxy war with the Soviet Union.

The Korean peninsula, divided since the 1953 ceasefire that established the Demilitarized Zone along the 38th parallel, continues to be characterized by confrontation, with some 30,000 US troops permanently stationed there.

USA, the sole superpower, engaged in the establishment of a new world order is embroiled and entangled in Iraq and Afghanistan, things far out of plumb in both places, signs of success not in sight and the deadly war against terrorism, hunting an elusive enemy, a formidable task of keeping Iran and North Korea in line has indeed been an ordeal. Both have refused to give in to the pressure and continued with their respective nuclear program.

North Korea (like Iran) has continued with the testing and improvement of its missile program; an international stir was caused by North Korea firing and testing a long-range missile sailing through

Japanese air space akin to firing a shot across the bows of a ship.

All the arguments advanced by Iran in defense of her nuclear technology development are valid for North Korea as well and it has pursued her goal disregarding all threats of sanctions likewise, but the conduct of nuclear test does not mean that it is ready to launch a nuclear-tipped missile tomorrow. However, the way North Korea has gone about developing its missiles, alongside with her nuclear program, it may require very little time to be ready to mount the weapon on her missiles; it is another matter if it has any target in view. It, as all other nuclear-weapon states, is probably satisfied with having a clout that would make a would-be invader think more than twice before undertaking the venture. North Korean leaders, while talking about their nuclear program, have stated that had Iraq actually possessed nuclear weapons it would not have been in the condition it finds herself today. The motivation for North Korea's present course of action is therefore quite obvious military action. There is now a dilemma for USA. Timing of the Korean blast, on the face of it, makes a military option for USA most unsuitable. Historically, North Korea, which has faced devastating famines, is believed to be able to disregard the misery its people are likely to suffer as a result of the sanctions.

At another level, in the Islamic World, there is a perception that America is anti-Islam and that is why it is so set against Iran's nuclear program while it has allowed, rather helped, Israel to develop a sizeable arsenal of nuclear weapons, which is sitting in the middle of the oil rich Arab world where USA has already made an incursion by invading Iraq, to maintain a stranglehold on the oil resources of the Middle East. North Korea becoming nuclear has brought about a drastic change at the strategic level, especially in the Pacific region and of course in the whole world. The use of military force as the last option of diplomacy has become almost redundant and nuclearisation in its own way has contributed towards ensuring peace between nations. The dominant role in determining North Korea's external and internal policies has been played by Kim Il

Sung, the "Great Leader", and since his death in 1994, by his son and successor, Kim Jong Il, popularly known as the "Dear Leader". They maintained totalitarian control, and built up a personality cult, which is in marked contrast to the regime in South Korea, a democratic society with a market economy, that has flourished with US and Japanese investment and technology transfers.

That North Korea today is a nuclear power is owed in no small measure to the return of hard-line policy in Washington with President Bush's ascent to power. North Korea has been a sizeable military power since the bloody Korean war of early 1950s. It has more than a million men under arms. Ten thousand or more of its guns are deployed along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and are said to be capable of inflicting great damage on Seoul within days of an outbreak of war. The 37000 US troops are only marginally safer in such a dire eventuality. It is easy to include North Korea in Bush's "axis of evil" and threaten it with the preemptive war doctrine of Washington's neo-conservative ideologues but extremely difficult to invade.

Coercion has taken the form of relentless sanctions that Pyongyang has tried to get lifted by using its pursuit of nuclear weapons and delivery systems as a bargaining chip. Clinton gave it a try and probably opened up a door to a possible rapprochement; Bush, on the other hand, slammed it shut. The underlying dynamic was probably the insistence on creating conditions for a regime change. In 1994 there was an agreed framework requiring it to give up the quest for nuclear weapons in return for two US-supplied nuclear-power reactors. By October 2002, it was accusing the United States of reneging on its commitment. Soon thereafter it took nuclear fuel rods to the Yongbyon plant, which shot to fame on October 9.

In 2003 North Korea increased pressure on the US by withdrawing from the NPT and firing missiles towards Japan a few weeks later. In May, DPRK signaled further defiance by informing Seoul that inter-Korean agreement on keeping the peninsula free of nuclear weapons was no longer valid. It still offered to give up nuclear deterrence if the US

were to change its hostile policy and drew up a list of concessions virtually as a pre-condition for continued participation in the six-nation talks. In July 2006, it test-fired seven missiles and raised worldwide concern.

Washington's policy has all along been a hostage to its repeated declarations that it would not tolerate DPRK's nuclearisation. Pyongyang has obviously calculated that there is a window of opportunity created by setbacks suffered by the US in its wars in the Middle East. It could not have been unaware of the fact that the test would bring universal condemnation but, true to its tradition, has decided to dare the international community to push sanctions to their utmost limit. Given its fragile economy, DPRK will pay a heavy price; but would the world be able to cope with a failed nuclear state? DPRK has just pushed the world into uncharted waters. There are no precedents here for decision-making.

China and Russia will be particularly concerned about instability on their borders, especially if it takes the form of refugees streaming out of North Korea. For Seoul, the prospects of a devastating war would be a real nightmare. If Japan tries to overcome its time-honoured abhorrence of nuclear weapons, the United States will face the dilemma of accepting the risk of revived militarism in its foremost Pacific ally. In testing a nuclear device, Kim Jong-Il has added to the global trend of resisting American unilateralism. Challenging the United States' hegemony in the Pacific is to undo one of the greatest consequences of the Second World War. What happens in the months ahead will have a deep impact on the evolution of a new world order. It will not be surprising if, after the initial sabre-rattling, the world community counsels the United States to purchase a Korean rollback, as in the case of South Africa, with a larger package of incentives.

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effect, if imposed. Diplomacy has to be resumed and pursued in an even-handed way.

Significantly, some western analysts have pointed out the difference in approach by the West in dealing with potential proliferators. There is a general consensus that the Korean penin-

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even-handed way.

The author is former Chief of Air Staff, Bangladesh Air Force.

US Endgame in Iran

DAVID TEMPLE

THE US objective in Iran, in its broadest sense, is to integrate the country into the mainstream of modern international relations in a way that will protect American economic, energy and security interests. As long as Iran continues to enrich uranium, the US will consider it as a threat to these interests and will seek measures to alter the security balance in its favor, preferably through regime change. US officials will not believe claims by Iranian officials that they seek uranium enrichment and plutonium separation for electricity generation only. This is not only because there exists cheaper ways to fuel power plants, but also because the threat posed by Iranian nuclear capability is simply too high for US policy-makers to accept any risks.

With the American military strained to breaking point in Iraq and Iran flying high on a wave of international support and high oil prices, America is facing the realization that a military strike on Iran is not a feasible option. Regime change seems equally unlikely. With Russia, China, and even France, signaling their adversity to sanctions, the US must pursue a policy of carrots over sticks-looking to provide economic and political incentives to dissuade Iran from continuing to enrich uranium.

In order to do this, the US should look at the reasons for which Iran is seeking nuclear capability. These are in brief: protection from external security threats; as an assertion of Persian power in a region where the US, Israel and Pakistan have nuclear weapons; and recently, to satisfy a domestic population that increasingly views Iran's nuclear program as a nationalist issue. Thus, any solution to the current standoff will need to address each of these core concerns. Meanwhile, the US will seek to preserve a firm bottomline that eschews all Iranian uranium enrichment and plutonium separation capabilities. Due to the possibility that future terror attacks could be sponsored by Iran, it would also be highly unlikely for the US to offer Iran a blanket security guarantee of the sort that helped persuade Japan, West Germany and South Korea to give up their nuclear capabilities.

To understand what would be acceptable, it is prudent to examine what the US has settled for in the past. First and foremost, US policy has sought to dissuade nuclear aspirants by alleviating their security concerns. This will be difficult vis-à-vis Iran, because Washington will want to keep the option of armed intervention open. However, the US must realize that a diplomatic solution will require America to credibly assure Iran that it recognizes Iranian sovereignty and that there will be no

use of force as long as Iranian compliance with IAEA obligations is satisfactory. The lack of such guarantees significantly undermined last summer's incentive package. Expect the US to settle for language similar to that found in the 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea that extends "formal assurance" against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the US," but that does not rule out future military action. Similar assurances should come from Russia, China, and the EU-3. As long as Tehran perceives a threat of regime change from outside, it will not relinquish its nuclear program.

Any diplomatic solution will also need to address the question of domestic energy supplies. Since Iran has already refused the offer of a five-year guaranteed fuel supply from Russia, negotiators will have to find a compromise that protects Iran's "sovereign right to a full nuclear fuel cycle." In 1994, the US offered North Korea limited oil supplies and the construction of two peaceful, proliferation-resistant, light-water reactors; similar concessions may be offered to Iran in exchange for stringent IAEA inspections and a list of past violations. Based on the Iranian nationalist sentiment surrounding the nuclear program, any US offers will have to be implemented immediately to allow Iranian politicians to save face-and to prevent the setbacks that occurred in North Korea. Complicated timetables will not suffice. Therein, dropping the precondition that Iran suspend all uranium enrichment for talks to proceed would be a productive and relatively innocuous concession.

Finally, the US will have to provide a targeted and timely package of economic incentives to encourage Iran to forego its nuclear program. The challenge for the Bush administration is to demonstrate to Iran that economic cooperation will be more beneficial than nuclear weapons in furthering Iran's goal of regional power. (With its unique experience, China could provide tangible and sincere assistance in this regard.) Last summer's offer of support for WTO membership, spare parts for civil airlines, and a framework for increased trade and investment are a step in the right direction. The US should accompany this with substantial fiscal support aimed at key areas of Iranian civil society such as public health and/or infrastructure development.

Washington's recent temperance seems to indicate that the White House has understood the costs of its bullying rhetoric towards Iran. With any luck, moderates in Tehran will seize the opportunity to end the cycle of demoralisation and engage in a mutually productive dialogue.

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The author is Research Intern, IPCS.

Democracy, manufacture of consent, and the Iraq war

ABUL H. AZAM, PHD

I know of no country in which there is so little independence of discussion as in America," so wrote Tocqueville (1805-1859) more than one and a half-centuries ago. Objections to government policies, grounded in serious observation of facts, are dubbed unpatriotic, undemocratic, and considered hostile toward America.

Democracy is not always akin to justice and freedom, and actions of countries professing democracy may not necessarily be peace loving or freedom seeking. Reflecting on secular democracy, Pope John Paul II commented that: "democracy as a form of government is not a good in and of, itself, that its goodness depends on the virtues of its citizens, and that, when those are lacking, it can promote or protect heinous evils... tyranny can arise in the name of the will of the majority..." (Michael J. Baxter, Dismissing the We Fallacy from the Body of Christ: The Task of Catholics in a Time of War, South Atlantic Quarterly 101:2, Spring 2002, Duke University Press. (Mr. Baxter is an Assistant Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame.)

In secular democracy all convictions, moral or otherwise, are reduced to interest groups, and convergence of these interest groups generates a majority decision. "Indeed, politics in the United States is designed to translate moral and religious convictions into interests which are set over against other interests, which are then adjudicated so as to achieve whatever relative form of justice and peace is attainable given these differences," observes Michael J. Baxter. The outcome of this process can be far from the values that a nation may publicly profess. A cursory look at the history of the world's democracies will vindicate the Pope's position.

Democratically elected Hitler's holocaust, two world wars among the world's democracies, annihilation of aborigines in Australia, colonization for economic exploitation, structuring of the world along racial lines, the genocide against the Indian population in the United States, slavery and subsequent Jim Crow

persecution, persistent racism, internment of US citizens of Japanese descent, McCarthyism, US engagements abroad during the cold war are only a few examples of tyranny by democracy. When the dust of the war on terror settles, the suffering of people under the Patriot Act will be an adjunct to this list.

On the fifth anniversary of 9/11, Mr. Bush conceded the absence of any link between al-Qaeda and Iraq, yet he continued with the general rhetoric about the necessity of US presence in Iraq to combat terrorism. His ever shifting reasons for US engagement in

meeting, which was held in February 1, it was clear to O'Neil that: "from the start, we were building the case against Hussein and looking at how we could take him out and change Iraq into a new country. --- It was all about finding a way to do it. That was the tone of it. The president saying 'fine. Go find me a way to do this.'" (Ron Suskind, The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neill, 75, 86.)

"I think they had a set mind," remarked Mr. Blix, the Chief of UN weapons inspector. "It was a reaction to 9/11 that we have to strike some

The media played a ridiculously subservient role, and gave the president and his war council a blind seal of approval, which Toronto Sun Columnist Eric Margolis characterized as: "And so it went. Lie after lie. Scare upon scare. Fakery after fakery, trumpeted by the tame [American] media that came to resemble the lickspittle press of the old Soviet Union. Ironically, in the end, horrid Saddam Hussein turned out to be telling the truth all along [about not having weapons of mass destruction], where Bush and Blair were not."

Iraq seem to elude public scrutiny and the US press, in deference to various interest groups, has imposed self-censorship on the matter. Iraq was accused of possessing weapons of mass destruction, but it turned out that there were none; Iraq was linked to al-Qaeda, though that link proved to be missing; finally, invasion was needed to free the Iraqi people from the tyranny of Saddam; Saddam has been removed, but the tyranny of the US armed forces remain.

US-led allied troops cannot be prosecuted by Iraqi authorities for their atrocities, and can do anything and everything with the life and property of Iraqis. Incident after incident of brutality have surfaced during the period of US occupation. One can only guess at the number of unreported incidents. The US torture brigade puts to shame any contemporary army.

In reality, the US invasion of Iraq was decided even before the UN weapons inspectors had completed their job. Mr. Bush came to the White House with the clear intention of attacking Iraq. On January 30, Mr. Bush, for the first time, met the principles of the National Security Council; Paul O'Neal, then Treasury Secretary commented: "Ten days in, and it was about Iraq." By the second

theoretical, hypothetical links between Saddam Hussein and the terrorists. That was wrong. There wasn't anything. The Americans and British created facts where there were none at all. The Americans needed [Iraq to have] WMD to justify the Iraq war." (James Bamford, A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies (Doubleday, 2004), 360.)

The infamous Downing Street Memo, dated July 23, 2002, and made public by Britain's Sunday Times on May 1, 2005, broke the story that as early as eight months before the invasion of Iraq, British Prime Minister Tony Blair "had made his fundamental decision when he met President Bush in Crawford, Texas, in April 2002." (Michael Smith, "Blair planned Iraq war from start", The Sunday Times, May 01, 2005. Retrieved from Times online) The memo showed concern about "US drive towards invasion and Britain's need for a legal excuse" to justify war against Iraq, and during the Downing Street meeting, Britain's Intelligence chief Sir Richard Dearlove, who had recently visited CIA Chief George Tenet in Washington, related his impression of US intentions: "Military action was now seen as inevitable --- Bush wanted to

remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD." In pursuit of justification for the war, "the intelligence and the facts were being fixed around the policy," Dearlove warned. (David Manning, The Secret Downing Street Memo: Secret and Strictly Personal UK Eyes Only, The Sunday Times Britain, May 01, 2005, Times Online (www.timesonline.co.uk) The Downing Street Memo made it clear that war plans were afoot long before any fact of the time justified such action.

Mr. Bush even invoked God to justify the Iraq war. Four months into the Iraq war, in 2003, Mr. Bush told the Palestinian Foreign Minister during the Israeli-Palestinian Summit at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh: "I am driven by a mission from God. God would tell me, 'George go fight these terrorists in Afghanistan,' and I did. And then God would tell me 'George, go and end tyranny in Iraq,' and I did." (Ewen MacAskill, George Bush: 'God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq', Guardian, Friday October 7, 2005. Downloaded from www.guardian.co.uk)

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Democracy is at peril when a fusion of public opinion with government position is achieved through carefully orchestrated propaganda by various

players in a specific situation. As it has been during the war on Iraq, media information was never even nearly complete, and the public in general were fed sanitized versions of world opinion. TV images were unabashedly biased. Never having seen the human calamities of US bombings in Iraq, along with utterly biased and inadequate education on US history, the US public had no objectivity to rely upon. By use of "consensus-fabricating syntax," such as 'our interest 'our freedom,' in speeches and talk shows consent for "disguised sacralization of violence" was manufactured. (Eric Margolis, Web of cold-blooded lies, Toronto Sun, Sunday, June 12, 2005. Downloaded from http://torontosun.ca) Abraham Lincoln had foreseen what happened in recent times. These are his words: "I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country... Corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money of the country will endeavour to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the republic is destroyed. I feel, at this moment, more anxiety for the safety of my country than ever before, even in the midst of war." Corporate interests, and the US political establishment, capitalized on the West's deep-rooted Islam-phobia, and found a willing partner among the Christian fundamentalists.

Finally, the blind rally behind the call for war was attained by an old tactic well described by General McArthur in 1957: "Our government has kept us in a perpetual state of fear -- kept us in a continuous stampede of patriotic fervor -- with the cry of grave national emergency. Always there has been some terrible evil at home, or some monstrous foreign power that was going to gobble us up, if we did not blindly rally behind it."

At this point democracy became a pawn at the hands of the interest groups, which stood to benefit from this conflict.

The author is Senior Fellow, Economics Department, North Carolina A&T State University.