

Some reflections on North Korea's nuclear test

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As has been widely reported by all the media, on Saturday, Oct. 14, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Resolution No. 1718, which sets up sanctions against the People's Democratic Republic of Korea for carrying out a nuclear test on Oct. 9.

The resolution, negotiated by the United States and its allies with Russia and China, asks for the elimination of all of North Korea's nuclear armaments but rules out any military intervention against that country.

It states that the nuclear test is "a clear threat to international peace and security" and forbids North Korea to import or export any material that might be used for the manufacture of nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles.

In addition, it orders all countries to freeze North Korean assets (money) and forbids the travel of any person linked to the support to North Korea's arms programs to any country that is a member of the United Nations.

The resolution does not include an embargo on conventional military material. However, it prohibits any trade involving combat vehicles, warships, warplanes and rockets.

Most dangerous, however, is that the resolution enjoins all countries to inspect any merchandise entering or leaving North Korea for the purpose of preventing any illegal traffic in weapons of mass destruction or ballistic missiles. It is reported that this was one of the most problematic and debated items in the resolution.

And, although the resolution was approved, Chinese representative Wang Guangya said his country disagreed with that particular aspect because "the idea of an interception of ships might easily lead into the war of provocation that would have serious implications in the region."

"China does not approve the inspection of shipments," Wang said, "and consequently we have reservations about the provisions of the resolution. China seriously calls upon the countries involved to adopt a responsible and prudent attitude on this issue and abstain from taking provocative steps that may increase tensions."

Russian ambassador Vitaly Churkin said that his government hoped "that Pyongyang will understand the response" of the Security Council and pointed out that "all sanctions must be revoked as soon as the North Korean government complies with the resolution."

For his part, the North Korean representative, Pak Kil Yon, rejected the resolution and accused the Security Council of "giving in to the pressures of the United States, allowing itself to be manipulated and losing all impartiality." The ambassador claimed North Korea's right to self-defense and announced that his government will consider any increase in U.S. pressure against his country as a declaration of war.

It is opportune to remember that, since 1953, the year the Korean War ended, North Korea has lived in an official state of war against the United States and South Korea, because what was signed at Panmunjom was an armistice. Successive U.S. governments have systematically refused to sign a true peace or have imposed conditions that are unacceptable to the North Koreans.

One interesting fact is that the South Korean government refused to support any measure adopted by the U.N. Security Council that might imply the use of force, which in a way distances South Korea from the American position and brings it closer to China's.

Only 24 hours earlier, the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries, based in New York, had issued a statement expressing its "concern" at the same time that it acknowledged the complexities derived from the nuclear test on the Korean peninsula, which "underscores the need to work even more vigorously to achieve the Movement's objectives of disarmament, including the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Movement urges the involved parties to exercise moderation, which contributes to the regional security..."

Farther on, the Movement expresses its wishes that the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula be achieved, and it supports the resumption of the six-part conversations (U.S., China, U.N., Japan and the two Koreas) as soon as possible, because it firmly believes "that diplomacy and dialogue through peaceful means must continue with a view to achieving a long-term solution to the Korean nuclear question."

On this point, I think it's proper to make clear that the PDRK is not reluctant to engage in those conversations, as long as no one imposes steps that might contribute to the PDRK's military debilitation without receiving anything in exchange, except for promises that, given the experience of other nations, are never kept.

The most convincing example is the 1994 agreement between the U.S. and North Korea in which the U.S. promised to build in North Korea two light-water reactors — which do not product plutonium — and to deliver 500,000 tons of crude oil and 150,000 tons of food every year.

In practice, William Clinton's administration abided by that agreement only partially, because it waited until 2000 to begin the construction of the foundations for the light-water reactors and then abandoned the project. It also suspended the shipment of crude, which forced the PDRK, in the midst of a particularly cold winter, to start its heavy-water nuclear plants to provide its people with electricity and heating.

No one talks about that, and when the U.S. media mention it, they stress that North Korea did not keep its part of the agreement.

Elsewhere (and to me it's the most important part, from the point of view of the present situation in the world), the Movement, "reaffirms its principled position regarding nuclear disarmament, which continues to be its top priority, and related issues of nuclear nonproliferation in all its aspects, and stresses its concern over the threat to humanity of the permanent existence of nuclear arms and their possible use, or threat of use."

Also, the Movement reiterates "its deep concern over the slow motion toward nuclear disarmament and the lack of progress on the part of the States that possess nuclear weapons."

And it highlights "the need for the States that possess nuclear weapons to comply with the commitment they contracted in 2000, regarding the total elimination of nuclear weapons and, in that sense, [the Movement] stresses the urgent need to begin negotiations without delay."

So far, these have been the most important aspects of the statement by the Movement of Nonaligned Countries. In my opinion, it puts on the table an element that is left unspoken when the time comes to apply sanctions for noncompliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty: the obligation of the countries that possess nuclear weapons to eliminate them from their arsenals.

Almost no press medium takes the trouble to mention this aspect of the NNT, while in recent times we have heard the U.S. threats about using them in small amounts (nuclear minibombs) against enemy objectives as part of its much-touted "war on terrorism," at the same time it develops new types of atomic weapons.

Even French President Jacques Chirac said in May that his army would use nuclear weapons if it were attacked and considered it necessary. Although he later softened his speech, he had put the world on notice of France's position.

The underlying problem with the North Korean nuclear test is therefore a lot more complicated, although the five permanent members of the Security Council, all of them nuclear powers, did not consider it so. Neither did the 10 nonpermanent members.

It's no secret to anyone that, for many years now, U.S. governments have maintained an aggressive attitude toward North Korea and have refused to sign a stable and lasting peace accord, despite the constant proposals on the Korean side and the good offices of other states.

Just a few days ago, the Pyongyang government again proposed to the White House to sit down for bilateral talks, an invitation that was refused by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and President Doubya Bush himself. Why? Is it perhaps "humiliating" for the U.S. power?

In recent weeks, the White House adopted a series of economic measures against Pyongyang that go beyond the sanctions imposed by the Security Council, after the North Korean Army carried out several missile-launching tests.

Weeks before those tests, Russia, India and Pakistan had experimented with new nuclear-capable missiles, yet no one sanctioned them. Why are some countries allowed and others not? Among the unilateral measures taken by the administration of Doubya Bush is the systematic persecution of all of North Korea's financial operations, same as it does with Cuba.

The PDRK violated two aspects of the NNT, from which it withdrew in 2003: it obtained nuclear capability and carried out a test. Israel, India and Pakistan, which never signed the NNT, did the same. Israel was never the target of sanctions, because the U.S. prevented it, while India and Pakistan suffered minimal sanctions, compared to those imposed now against North Korea. Why are some allowed and others not?

Moreover, President Doubya Bush earlier this year signed a nuclear-development accord with India even though that country has not signed the NNT, something that is forbidden by the accord itself.

As we see, the matter is a lot more complex. It is a question of the double standard being used to deal with world problems. North Korea, Iraq and Iran were placed in the notorious "axis of evil" of President Doubya Bush.

Iraq was attacked and today suffers the consequences of the occupation and a civil war provoked to a great extent by the occupiers themselves. Iran, a signatory of the NNT, is being submitted to all kinds of pressures and threats of sanctions for refusing to stop enriching uranium for its nuclear tests, something that the NNT considers a right of all its members, and despite the fact that there is no proof that the Iranian government is trying to obtain nuclear weapons.

There is an increasing number of reports that the U.S. government is concentrating naval and air forces in the Arab-Persian Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, with a view to attacking the Persian nation.

The question that must be asked is whether North Korea has the right to defend itself when more drastic measures are taken against its economy and there is proof of the existence of U.S. troops and nuclear arms in South Korea and other nearby countries. When you see your neighbor's beard in fire, dip your beard in water, goes the old Spanish saying.

Without waiting for the Security Council resolution, the Japanese government adopted a series of punitive measures toward Pyongyang, among them forbidding North Korean ships to enter Japanese ports. Japan, as everyone knows, is undergoing a process of remilitarization, slow but constant, and some of the chicken-hawks who today govern the United States believe that Japan should obtain nuclear weapons.

What for? To serve as a buffer to China? To become the region's policeman?

But there is another element of great importance that must be stressed: To possess nuclear weapons implies a huge security in this convulsed world, where the major power maintains an aggressive policy and assumes the right to pre-emptively attack anyone it deems convenient, first preparing public opinion on the basis of lies, as it did with Iraq and is doing now with Iran.

The five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are the principal owners of nuclear arms, with the exception of Israel, which reportedly has between 200 and 300 of them. So far, despite their propaganda, none of them has honestly offered to disarm and you can be sure they won't. None of them has kept its promise to destroy its nuclear capabilities because to possess nuclear arms gives them an extraordinary power over the rest of the nations.

While that is so, while many countries feel threatened by the aggressive policies of the current U.S. administration, it will be impossible to keep them from trying to arm themselves with atomic devices capable of dissuading any aggression on the basis of "you hit me, I hit you." And that's a risk the White House has never accepted.

Returning to Security Council Resolution No. 1718, I think it is a partial triumph for the U.S. position, limited by the stances of China, Russia and South Korea, because it does not authorize the use of military force. But it leaves a door open to aggression: the inspection of those ships and planes that enter and leave North Korea.

Will the People's Democratic Republic of Korea — which is not going to renounce what it considers its right to self-defense, which is proud of its independence and sovereignty — allow its ships and planes to be inspected by vessels of the United States, Japan or any other country?

I think this part of the resolution leaves the door open to any provocation, as the Chinese delegation stated, and I am almost sure that, when the time is right, the warmongering government of the United States will not waste the opportunity. Time will tell.

P.S.

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