

US pushes through UN resolution against North Korea

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The US administration has prepared the way for an escalating confrontation with North Korea over its nuclear test last Monday, by pushing tough new sanctions against Pyongyang through the UN Security Council. After a week of US arm-twisting, China and Russia dropped their objections to Washington's draft and joined the unanimous vote for the resolution.

The UN resolution condemned North Korea's underground nuclear test, describing it as "a clear threat to international peace and security". It demanded that Pyongyang "abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear weapons programs," suspend all ballistic missile activities, return to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and immediately return to the multilateral six-party talks "without precondition".

The resolution calls on UN member states to ban the sale or transfer of materials and technology related to so-called weapons of mass destruction, as well as major military hardware, such as tanks and warships, and luxury items. It also imposes a freeze on North Korean financial assets and a travel ban on officials and scientists that have connections to WMD programs. By invoking Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, the resolution makes the measure binding on all members.

North Korea's UN ambassador Pak Gil Yon immediately said his government "totally rejected" the resolution and condemned the UN Security Council for its "gangster-like" methods and its "double-standards" for neglecting the nuclear threat posed by the US to Pyongyang. He referred in particular to Bush's 2002 speech including North Korea in an "axis of evil" with Iraq and Iran. Pak warned that if the US continued to "increase pressure" on North Korea, his government would consider it a declaration of war and take countermeasures.

There is no doubt that North Korea's nuclear test was a reckless and rather desperate act, which, far from enhancing its security, has played directly into the hands of the Bush administration and threatens to trigger a nuclear arms race in North East Asia. But the obvious anger at the UN's hypocrisy is certainly justified. While condemning

Pyongyang, the UN Security Council members have nothing to say about Washington's long record of bellicosity toward North Korea, threats of "regime change" and repeated refusal to hold bilateral talks or normalise relations.

The US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, took vindictive delight in including a ban on "luxury items" in the resolution. Its only purpose is to promote US propaganda vilifying North Korean leader Kim Jong-il as a playboy who "starves his own people". North Koreans have been losing weight, Bolton told the press, and "maybe this will be a little diet for Kim Jong-il". In fact, the US, which has maintained an economic embargo of North Korea since the 1950s and has exploited its "humanitarian aid" for political ends, bears a heavy responsibility for the crisis that led to terrible famines in the 1990s.

North Korea has repeatedly offered to give up its nuclear programs in return for a security guarantee from the US and steps to end the US blockade of the country. Following last week's nuclear test, Pyongyang declared its willingness to negotiate the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. North Korea refused to return to six-party talks, involving the two Koreas, the US, China, Japan and Russia, after Washington provocatively pressured a Macau bank to freeze North Korean assets. Under the new UN resolution, the US efforts to tighten the financial noose around Pyongyang will obviously intensify.

China, a formal ally of North Korea, has been caught in a dilemma by the nuclear test. Beijing had sponsored the six-party talks as a means of defusing the protracted confrontation over North Korea's nuclear programs and had strongly warned Pyongyang against detonating a nuclear device. China is deeply concerned that Japan will exploit the test to develop its own nuclear arsenal. At the same time, however, Beijing is hostile to the Bush administration's bellicose campaign against the Pyongyang regime and fears that the constant heightening of tensions in North East Asia is directed at it.

China, backed by Russia, opposed two elements of the draft US resolution—the use of Chapter 7 of the UN charter,

which was exploited by the US to justify its invasion of Iraq, and the interception and search of cargo entering and leaving North Korea. According to the *New York Times*, “tense negotiations” took place right up to the final minutes before the UN vote. In the end, the US modified the resolution to invoke Article 41 of Chapter 7, which specifically refers to the use of “measures not involving the use of armed force”.

Nevertheless, the resolution does provide for “cooperative action including the inspection of cargo to and from the DPRK [North Korea]” to prevent “illicit trafficking” in weapons of mass destruction. The clause declares that such action must be in line with international law, and, at China’s insistence, omitted a specific reference to the use of military force to stop ships in international waters, but it does provide the US with a lever to press ahead with its provocative Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

Under the PSI launched in 2003, the US and its allies, including Japan and Australia, have been preparing to intercept ships on the high seas and aircraft in international air space on the pretext of searching for weapons of mass destruction. Bolton, as US Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control, was responsible for pushing the proposal, which sought to legitimise what is illegal under international law and is regarded as piracy or an act of war. In 2003, Bolton argued that the interdiction of ships and aircraft was permitted by international law.

Less than an hour after the UN resolution was passed, China’s UN ambassador Wang Guangya said China would not participate in any inspection regime because it would create “conflict that could have serious implications for the region”. He told reporters: “The PSI, politically, China will not do it. I believe the exercises under the PSI will easily lead, whether intentional or not ... to different escalations of provocations.” Wang urged member states to adopt a “prudent and responsible attitude” on inspections and refrain from provocative steps.

Yesterday Bolton cautiously skirted around the issue of international law, declaring that searches could take place in ports and at land crossings. He told CNN the resolution did not call for a sea blockade of North Korea, and interdiction of banned items could be accomplished without one. However, Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer announced yesterday that the Howard government was already considering sending warships to participate in a blockade of North Korea.

The US and its allies are clearly contemplating military means to intercept North Korean vessels, despite a UN resolution excluding the use of armed force. The Bush administration, which has repeatedly demonstrated its contempt for international law and the UN, now has the means for engineering incidents on the high seas that can be

used to justify more aggressive action, including the use of military force, against North Korea.

Not surprisingly, President Bush hailed the UN response as “swift and tough”. Bolton said the US was “very pleased” with the resolution, which was “exactly in line” with its recommendations. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is about to depart for North East Asia to step up the pressure, on China and South Korea in particular, for a harder line against North Korea.

The Bush administration responded to Wang’s comments on Saturday by insisting that China is bound to carry out every aspect of the UN resolution. “I’m quite certain that China is going to live up to its responsibilities,” Rice declared. Bolton remarked that if China were willing to cut its support to North Korea, it “would be powerfully persuasive in Pyongyang ... I think China has a heavy responsibility here.”

Washington clearly regards the UN resolution just as a first step. As Bolton hinted, US pressure will be brought to bear on China to impose broader sanctions on North Korea, including on food and oil shipments. China is North Korea’s largest trading partner and the source of its oil. For all its propaganda about Kim Jong-il starving his people, the Bush administration would have no hesitation in crippling the North Korean economy in a bid to starve the country into submission.

The aggressive US response to Wang’s remarks further underscores the fact that Washington’s overriding concern is not the nuclear test or even North Korea. The US, which is armed with thousands of sophisticated nuclear weapons, faces no serious military threat from North Korea. The Bush administration has constantly exploited the North Korean nuclear crisis to heighten tensions in North East Asia as a means for asserting its domination against its rivals, especially China.

At the same time, Washington’s threatening posture against North Korea is also aimed at menacing other countries targeted by the Bush administration, particularly Iran.



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