

## Conclusion

The nuclear landscape that the last quarter of the XX century was familiar with is changing. The NPT regime has not been able to freeze horizontal or vertical proliferation. If not addressed properly, the regime could gradually unravel. The danger of horizontal proliferation is present in the Asian heartland and needs to be addressed in a holistic manner, i.e. in conjunction with broader peaceful uses of nuclear energy and halting the vertical proliferation.

The Korean case demonstrates that the question of denuclearization of DPRK needs to be addressed in a broader regional security context and addressing DPRK's wider security needs and challenges. The issue is not a military one, but a political and legal. The challenge is to find such a solution that would be politically acceptable to all the parties concerned, but would at the same time discourage others from weakening the non-proliferation regime and halt vertical proliferation. The only way to do that is through negotiations. The questions of strengthening of the NPT regime and halting vertical proliferation should be duly addressed by the next NPT review conference in 2005.

## SEEKING PEACE IN A NUCLEAR STANDOFF: A COMMENT

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South Koreans are divided on the options open to them in dealing with the threat posed by Pyongyang's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Certainly the recent developments in North Korea's nuclear policy are a cause of concern not only for South Korea, but for the entire region and the world. Unfortunately, although there is a lot of talk between leaders of countries in the region (with the US pitching in) with threats and counter-threats being thrown about with abundance, nobody seems to be listening to and nobody is willing to look at the problem from Pyongyang's perspective. In these few comments I will attempt to do just that not because I agree with Pyongyang's position, which I don't, but because I do not agree with the prevalent opposing position either.

I also feel that out of sheer arrogance, we are missing an important opportunity to listen to what Pyongyang has to say. And I believe that no long-lasting solution can be reached if we continue talking at each other, or even past each other, rather than to each other<sup>1</sup>. Certainly muscle diplomacy can lead us to a very precarious situation.

North Korea insists that the blame for the present state of affairs falls squarely on US shoulders<sup>2</sup>. Apparently, so do most South Koreans.<sup>3</sup> Pyongyang was irritated when the US put it on the list of the "Axis of Evil" (together with Iraq, Iran, and later Cuba, Syria and Libya) at a time when talks between the North and the South were showing some progress. Pyongyang argues that Iraq has already been invaded, and North Korea is very much next on the list.

Some are of the opinion that a lasting solution is one based on peaceful negotiations among the people of the divided peninsula, whereas others believe that the only solution is a military one, with the involvement of the US.

There has been talk of tactical air strikes on North Korea's nuclear facilities and plutonium separation plants, economic sanctions and also a full scale invasion of the territory.

When presented with these latter options there are a number of questions that need to be raised.

Firstly one should ask why would Pyongyang want to voluntarily renounce its nuclear weapons program when the possibility of invasion seems to be on the table. In fact it has been on the table at least since 1998<sup>4</sup>. In its present economic misery, it does not have too many defense options open to it. The nuclear card may be the only one left for it to play. In

<sup>1</sup> See Kallander, George. 2003. Nuclear Crisis or Identity Crisis: North Korea in a Postmodern World. This volume.

<sup>2</sup> BBC News Online. N. Korea blames US in nuclear row. 25 April 2003. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/2974213.stm>

<sup>3</sup> Lynch, David J. Many S. Koreans pin blame on U.S., not North. USA Today – 5 January 2003. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2003-01-05-korea\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2003-01-05-korea_x.htm). See also McCormack, Gavan. US shares blame for North Korea's bad behaviour. The Age. 8 January 2003. <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/01/07/1041566406195.html>

<sup>4</sup> Halloran, Richard. New Warplan Calls for Invasion of North Korea. Global Beat – 14 November 1998. <http://www.nyu.edu/globalbeat/asia/Halloran11498.html>

all the ongoing debate this fact seems to be completely missed. There are absolutely no guarantees that if Pyongyang renounces its nuclear arsenal, the country will avoid an invasion. In fact the opposite may very well be true.

Robin Cook, former member of the British Cabinet, in his resignation speech on the onset of the war on Iraq, said that "Iraq's military strength is now less than half its size than at the time of the last Gulf war" and in fact, he continued "it is only because Iraq's military forces are so weak that we can even contemplate its invasion".<sup>5</sup> Iraq's military forces were weakened through a decade of sanctions. Can one blame North Korea if it feels a similar strategy may be at hand?

The advocates of the doctrine of preemptive strikes inevitably have to rely heavily on intelligence. Following the war on Iraq, many are particularly reluctant to rely on any intelligence information, as a lot of it turned out to be unreliable and some of it downright shoddy. In fact none of the claims on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction on British intelligence reports turned out to be true.<sup>6</sup> If intelligence agencies got their facts wrong on a key issue such as the presence of weapons of mass destruction on Iraqi soil (the very *raison d'être*, or so they claimed, of going to war) how can anyone rely on intelligence on North Korea, an even more isolated and closed territory.

Economic sanctions are presented as the only logical 'peaceful' alternative in dealing with North Korea. Sanctions are a weapon that the US and the UN have used in the past and seem to be a more acceptable form of international response to wayward nations. The threshold of tolerance for sanctions seems to be lower than going to war. However the impact of sanctions on civilians may be much more devastating than even war. North Korea refers to the application of sanctions as a weapon of mass destruction. I'm afraid they are not far off the mark.

The impact of economic sanctions can again be demonstrated by events in Iraq. A decade of sanctions has reduced the average GDP per capita fourteen fold, from \$2840 in 1989 to \$200 in 1997. This inadvertently had a dramatic impact on health, nourishment and education. Infant mortality doubled and child mortality quadrupled<sup>7</sup>. Children were the primary victims of sanctions. Hundreds of thousands of children, in fact.

As importantly, sanctions had no political impact. Saddam Hussein remained in power, even if Iraq's military development was severely handicapped.

I have absolutely no illusion that the human rights situation in North Korea is not dire to the extreme<sup>8</sup>. But I have no illusions about the human rights situation in many other countries, which have not made it on the list of the "Axis of Evil", some with much worse human rights records than some of those on the list. China, for example, is not on the list, despite its 1989 crackdown on democracy demonstrators at Tienanmen Square with the killing of over 2000 and many still held as political prisoners; despite the projected displacement of 1.9 million people on completion of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River<sup>9</sup>; despite the fact that we still have grave violations of human rights particularly in Xinjiang Uighur (East

<sup>5</sup> Robin Cook, Speech at the House of Commons, London, England, 18 March 2003.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/2859431.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/2859431.stm)

<sup>6</sup> Reynolds, Paul. Core of weapons case crumbling. BBC News Online – 13 July 2003.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3063361.stm>

<sup>7</sup> Middle East Report. Spring 1998. Middle East Research and Information Project.  
<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer206/sanc.htm>

<sup>8</sup> See the Amnesty International 2003 Report - <http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/Prk-summary-eng>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.irn.org/wcd/threegorges.shtml>

Turkestan) and Tibet and hundreds of political prisoners (the Amnesty International's 2003 Report mentions more than 180 people in Tibet, mainly Buddhist monks and nuns, that continue "to be imprisoned in violation of their fundamental human rights"<sup>10</sup>). Countries still continue to trade and deal with China. In fact China, a nuclear power itself, is considered as a key player in finding a solution to the North Korea impasse. The present human rights record of the United States, that often poses as the human rights policeman of the world, is not so bright either as it keeps holding hundreds of prisoners taken in Afghanistan in violation of their rights.

This leads me to my last argument on the lack of global justice and the application of double standards in global politics.

How can one country expect another to relinquish its nuclear, biological or chemical weapons when it has the largest stocks of such weapons itself? Should a country not put its own house in order before it expects others to do so? It was, after all, President Bush himself, who indicated that the U.S. may need to withdraw from another important weapon control treaty – the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

The US is prompt in dealing with those countries considered unfriendly to the US. In the meantime Israel, which has repeatedly, blatantly and consistently defied UN resolutions, and which itself has weapons of mass destruction (including up to 200 nuclear weapons<sup>11</sup>), is never dealt with.

Far too often the US has been allowed to apply two weights and two measures in its foreign relations, whether this is in matters of trade liberalization, military affairs or human rights issues. Maybe it is time for the world to say "No more". North Korea may be doing just that, albeit in the wrong way.

Speaking at the State of the Union Address in January 2003, President Bush said: "On the Korean Peninsula, an oppressive regime rules a people living in fear and starvation. Throughout the 1990s, the United States relied on a negotiated framework to keep North Korea from gaining nuclear weapons. We now know that that regime was deceiving the world, and developing those weapons all along. And today the North Korean regime is using its nuclear program to incite fear and seek concessions. America and the world will not be blackmailed." What the world needs now is less talk of this kind and a more balanced, sane and rational approach to the problems we are facing as a result of prevalent unilateral, neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies.

If peace is to prevail on the Korean peninsula, we have to support the talks between the people of the divided peninsula and we need to allow time for these talks to evolve without undue outside pressure. Above all we need to listen.

<sup>10</sup> <http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/Chn-summary-eng>

<sup>11</sup> BBC News Online – Israel 'may have 200 nuclear weapons'. 23 August 2000.  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/892941.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/892941.stm)