

Answer to Question

Question: North Korea announced on 25th May, 2009, that it carried out a successful nuclear test. It had earlier (on 8th May) warned that it was strengthening its nuclear arsenal, and accusing the Obama administration of hostile actions against it, had also refused to resume the six-party negotiations. Then on 27th May, 2009, it declared that North Korea was 'not committed to the ceasing of hostilities' signed with the United States. This refusal was in response to South Korea's participation in the American initiative to prevent nuclear proliferation. [al-Jazeera: 31.05.09].

What is the reaction of the international community towards these events? Are these leading to an escalation of tensions and war..., or is a war ruled out; will negotiations be resumed?

Answer: Yes, indeed there is escalation of tension especially after North Korea's refusal to back away from the armistice which was signed between North Korea and the US on 27th July, 1953 which resulted in ending the Korean war which was raging since 25th June, 1950. This armistice was simply a ceasing of hostilities and not a peace treaty as such. The escalation in tensions came to fore when North Korea carried out its first nuclear test in October, 2006, and reached alarming levels last month when it tested its ballistic missiles which means that North Korea is now capable of launching its long-range nuclear warhead missile with having to use aircrafts which may be confronted and prevented from reaching their target. Then after the 25th May, 2009 test, tension have reached to even alarming levels when it announced its latest successful nuclear test.

As for the international relations:

1. International reactions have come from various countries calling for a UN Security Council resolution to penalise North Korea. While North Korea has warned of taking other steps as well, the official North Korean News Agency carried a statement on 25th May, 2009 of the North Korean Foreign Ministry's official spokesman saying: "If the UNSC will make further provocative actions, this will inevitably lead to the DPRK's approach towards adopting stronger self-defensive counter-measures."

2. With regard to the US reaction, Barack Obama has stated: "North Korea's attempts to develop nuclear weapons, as well as its ballistic missile program, constitute a threat to international peace and security, and I strongly condemn their reckless action. North Korea's action pose a grave security threat to the people North-East Asia and it is a flagrant violation of the international law as well as North Korea's earlier commitments. Now the US and the international community must take steps to counter that". [Russia Today: 25.05.2009]. The US Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated at the Asian Security Forum conference held in Singapore that: "The United States will not accept North Korea as a nuclear-weapons state." He warned against the flaring of a nuclear arms race and said: "We will not stand idly by as North Korea builds the capability to wreak destruction on any target in the region, or on us." On the issue of nuclear proliferation, Gates said: "The transfer of nuclear weapons or material by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States and its allies, and we would hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such action." [Al-Jazeera: 30.05.09]. This is how the US expressed its anger over the North Korean actions and indicated that these acts constitute a threat to world peace, especially in North East Asia and it (US) will take steps against North Korea which it warned against transferring the nuclear technology to other countries or non-state entities.

America's story with North Korea's nuclear programme is not new, in fact it began in 1986 when the US demanded detailed information on its nuclear programme which North Korea refused to hand over to the US, instead it gave those detailed documents running into 19,000 pages to China. An agreement was reached between US and North Korea in 1994 after the US warned North Korea to target its nuclear reactors. This agreement calls for

putting North Korea's nuclear programme to a halt, shutting down of its Yongbyon reactors which was in operation since 1987. This was in exchange of the US supplying two light-water type reactors. But the US failed to honour its part of the promise and hence Korea resumed its nuclear activities, restarted the Yongbyon reactors and expelled the two international observers from the country in 2002. This was after the US accused it of carrying on a clandestine nuclear programme and North Korea counter accusing the US of breaching its promises to supplying two light-water powered nuclear reactors. In October, 2006, North Korea announced its first nuclear test, and in February 2007, the six-party gathering which comprises the North & South Korea, the United States, Russia, China and Japan reached an agreement to shut down the Yongbyon reactors in exchange for assistance in fuel supplies and the US announced an assistance of \$ 25 million. After these cash assistance reached North Korea, it allowed access to inspection and observers' teams and shut down the Yongbyon reactors. Then in July 2008, North Korea submitted its report on the nuclear programme within the framework of the deal that called for scrapping of its nuclear programme. The talks ended between them in 2008 as a result of their differences on ways to verify compliance to North Korea's earlier obligations provided for in the previous agreements. In the beginning of the current year, North Korea declared its withdrawal from the six-party talks and resumption of the Yongbyon reactors after having expelled the two international observers and threatened to resume its nuclear tests. In April this year, it carried out a test of its long-range missile capable of carrying satellite as it mentioned. The UN Security Council passed a resolution in condemnation and called for applying sanctions which were earlier frozen after the resolution no. 1718 of 2006 in the aftermath of its first nuclear test. Then on 14th April, 2009, it announced its decision to withdraw from the six-party talks in the wake of a UNSC resolution the previous day. It called the six-party talks as pointless and stated that it was no longer obliged to comply with any agreements reached among the group. A few days back, i.e. on 25th May, 2009, it announced the successful nuclear test.

From the above, it is evident that the United States has been cheating North Korea by requiring it to shut down its nuclear activities in exchange for no incentive except false promises and obligations which are either delayed, denied or short-changed. However, the North Korean are aware of it all, whenever it saw the US evading or dodging, it resumed its nuclear activity. It appears that the US has not been conclusively decisive on the subject, perhaps it is because it does not intend to strain its relations with China where it has its interests which are far more important and bigger than the nuclear reactors in North Korea.

Also, from America's actions, its statements and its reactions to the events in the North East Asian region, it is clear that the US has other objectives. One of these goals is to strengthen its presence in the region and consolidate itself there in order to render the countries in that region to become dependent upon US assistance. This will ensure that US is in a position to exploit and extort them especially since it has a large military presence in the area with a troop strength of around 250,000. So we see the US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates holding a special meeting with the defence ministers of South Korea and Japan on the sidelines of the Asian Security Forum being held currently in Singapore, after which he announced: "it is vital that United States, South Korea and Japan as well as the entire world cooperate to face this multi-faceted problem." [Radio Sawa: 31.05.09]. It means that the US is harnessing this crisis in order to strengthen its own stronghold in the region and demonstrate its leadership to the world as well as scare China that it (US) may perhaps start a war in the region with China's neighbour and ally, North Korea any time. In other words, the US wants to use this opportunity to blackmail China in order to extract compromises from it the area of economy, trade and finance as well as regional political issues and thereby prevent or at least delay merger of Taiwan into China. Thus China can be restrained and tied within its own borders by using the issue of North Korea's nuclear and missiles issue. This is not strange or unexpected of America which is trying to install anti-missile guns in Poland and radars in the Czech Republic against Russia citing threats from Korean and the Iranian missiles.

3. As for China's stance, it is a repetition of its earlier stand when North Korea had conducted its first test. China had called for restraint and diplomatic efforts. At the Asian Security Forum in Singapore, the Chief of Staff of the Chinese Armed Forces Gen. Ma Shao Tian called for adopting calm and calibrated methods in dealing with North Korea. He also called for eliminating all weapons of mass destruction from the region [Al-Jazeera: 30.05.09]. This indicates that China is not ready for a strike on North Korea. Just as the US is exploiting the nuclear issue, the Chinese are also trying to make use of the opportunities presented by North Korea's nuclear and missile tests. It is using the North Korean card to deal with Taiwan issue and to facilitate its merger into mainland China. The Chinese objective appears to be to use this as a pressure tool upon US so that America accedes to Taiwan's merger with the mainland. Thus both the United States as well as China are exploiting the Korean problem vis-a-vis Taiwan, but of course in opposite directions.

4. As for South Korea, it does not want to see any more deterioration in the situation which may lead to war which certainly will be to its disadvantage. The South Korean Defence Minister Lee Sang Hee told the Asian Security Forum in Singapore that his country will work with the six-party forum and the international community to find a solution to solve the crisis with North Korea. [Al-Jazeera: 30.05.09]. South Korea has consistently been attempting to resolve its problems with North Korea and two summit meetings have been held between their presidents in 2000 C.E and 2007 C.E, each of them on South Korean initiative.

5. As regard to Russian reaction, it came in the statement issued by the Russian President's Office after the telephonic conversation between President Medvedev and Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso, it said that the two sides agree on the importance of a strong response towards these actions that constitute a threat to world security regime. [Russia Today: 30.05.09]. Alexei Borodavkin, Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia called upon Pyongyang to desist from launching its ballistic missile. [Russia Today: 27.03.09]. This indicates that Russia's position on the North Korean issue differs from that of China and that by adopting such stand, Russia aims to have very good relations with Japan. It also indicates that Russia does not have an interest in North Korea developing its nuclear and missile programme, and also that Russia does not want the US to use this issue as a pretext and gain stronghold in the region. Russia also wants North Korea to remain committed to the six-party dialogue and not withdraw from it so that a solution can be reached to halt its nuclear & missile programme and thereby put an end to what is referred to as the Korean Peninsula conflict.

6. As for whether this escalation of tension would lead to war, or will the US strike at the North Korean nuclear installations, well, it is improbable and far-fetched, at least in the foreseeable future. America did not resort to such measures when North Korea did not have either a nuclear warhead or ballistic missile and the US was aware that Pyongyang was heading in that direction and expected it to eventually acquire nuclear capability. How can it now strike when North Korea possesses nuclear weapons and especially since its Pyongyang still has strong relations with China? Thus the chances of America launching attacks on North Korea are very slim in the near future at least. However it is expected that America will resort to other means and incentives to bring North Korea to the negotiating table and by bringing South Korea closer to it using various means to penetrate there and find channels of communications with some North Korean elements through which to work to change the leadership and bringing in a more moderate leadership, i.e. a leadership which understands America and accepts its offers and inducements. This is the method which America had adopted with all the communist countries. North Korea meanwhile is facing a severe economic crisis as a result of its strict isolation...though desired results cannot be guaranteed through all these efforts, America however is expected to exert all it can.

7th Jumadah al thani, 1430 A.H

31st, May, 2009 C.E