

International

New UN sanctions an 'act of war,' North Korea declares

Pyongyang vows to punish those who supported new resolution

BEIJING: The latest UN sanctions against North Korea are an act of war and tantamount to a complete economic blockade against it, North Korea's foreign ministry said yesterday, threatening to punish those who supported the measure. The UN Security Council unanimously imposed new sanctions on North Korea on Friday for its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, seeking to limit its access to refined petroleum products and crude oil and its earnings from workers abroad.

The UN resolution seeks to ban nearly 90 percent of refined petroleum exports to North Korea by capping them at 500,000 barrels a year and, in a last-minute change, demands the repatriation of North Koreans working abroad within 24 months, instead of 12 months as first proposed. The US-drafted resolution also caps crude oil supplies to North Korea at 4 million barrels a year and commits the Council to further reductions if it were to conduct another nuclear test or launch another ICBM.

In a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency, North Korea's foreign ministry said the United States was terrified by its nuclear force and was getting "more and more frenzied in the moves to impose the harshest-ever sanctions and pressure on our country". The new resolution was tantamount to a complete economic blockade of North Korea, the ministry said. "We define this 'sanctions resolution' rigged up by the US and its followers as a grave infringement upon the sovereignty of our Republic,

as an act of war violating peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and the region and categorically reject the 'resolution'," it said.

"There is no more fatal blunder than the miscalculation that the US and its followers could check by already worn-out 'sanctions' the victorious advance of our people who have brilliantly accomplished the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force", the ministry said. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Nov. 29 declared the nuclear force complete after the test of North Korea's largest-ever ICBM test, which the country said puts all of the United States within range.

Kim told a meeting of members of the ruling Workers' Party on Friday that the country "successfully realized the historic cause of completing the state nuclear force" despite "short supply in everything and manifold difficulties and ordeals owing to the despicable anti-DPRK moves of the enemies". North Korea's official name is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). South Korea's foreign ministry told Reuters it is aware of the North Korean statement on the new sanctions, again highlighting its position that they are a "grave warning by the inter-

national community that the region has no option but to immediately cease reckless provocations, and take the path of dialogue for denuclearization and peace".

'Balance of force'

The North Korean foreign ministry said its nuclear weapons were a self-defensive deterrence not in contradiction of international law.

“New sanctions tantamount to economic blockade”

"We will further consolidate our self-defensive nuclear deterrence aimed at fundamentally eradicating the US nuclear threats, blackmail and hostile moves by establishing the practical balance of force with the US," it said. "The US should not forget even a second the entity of the DPRK which rapidly emerged as a strategic state capable of posing a substantial nuclear threat to the US mainland," it added.

North Korea said those who voted for the sanctions would face its wrath. "Those countries that raised their hands in favor of this 'sanctions resolution' shall be held completely responsible for all the consequences to be caused by the 'resolution' and we will make sure for ever and ever that they pay heavy price for what they have done." The North's old allies China and

Russia both supported the latest UN sanctions. Tension has been rising over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, which it pursues in defiance of years of UN Security Council resolutions, with belligerent rhetoric coming from both Pyongyang and the White House.

In November, North Korea demanded a halt to what it called "brutal sanctions", saying a round imposed after its sixth and most powerful nuclear test on Sept 3 constituted genocide. US diplomats have made clear they are seeking a diplomatic solution but proposed the new, tougher sanctions resolution to ratchet up pressure on North Korea's leader. China, with which North Korea does some 90 percent of its trade, has repeatedly called for calm and restraint from all sides. China said on Saturday the new resolution also reiterated the need for a peaceful resolution via talks and that all sides needed to take steps to reduce tensions.

Chinese state-run tabloid the Global Times said on Saturday the tougher resolution was aimed at preventing war. It suggested the United States had wanted an even harsher resolution, and noted there was no indication in the resolution that the United Nations could grant the United States permission for military action. "The difference between the new resolution and the original US proposal reflects the will of China and Russia to prevent war and chaos on the Korean Peninsula. If the US proposals were accepted, only war is foreseeable," it said in an editorial. — Reuters

UN vote a setback but US still 'a key' to Mideast peace

WASHINGTON: Washington's latest overwhelming defeat at the United Nations may have been an embarrassment, but any claim it has lost its role as Middle East peace mediator will likely prove premature. A huge majority of UN member states, including close US allies and major aid recipients, voted Thursday to reject President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Underscoring the significance of the defeat, US ambassador Nikki Haley had warned that Trump would be watching and that she would be "taking names" of countries who let him down. But-again-Trump's "America First" policy delivered an "America Alone" result, leaving some Palestinians crowing that the United States can no longer serve as peace mediator. Vice President Mike Pence had already postponed a trip he was due to make to the region this week, after Palestinian and Arab Christian leaders had proved reluctant to meet him.

Peace broker

So, perhaps Washington will have to keep its powder dry for a few weeks as dust settles, some experts acknowledge. But if there is ever to be a long-elusive peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, only one broker can deliver it. "There's been peaks and valleys before on this issue," said David Makovsky, a peace process veteran and senior fellow of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "If I had a dollar every time people said 'Oh, it's over now, the US is not the broker...'" he said ironically. Dan Shapiro, who served as former president Barack Obama's ambassador to Israel, dismissed the vote as a "pathetic UN circus" and urged Washington to refocus on its goal. "What is US strategy to end the conflict, achieve two states, avoid permanent binational reality? Or at least keep those goals alive?" he demanded, on Twitter.

That strategy should reveal itself in the coming weeks or months, when Trump's son-in-law and peace envoy Jared Kushner reveals his hotly anticipated blueprint. Almost since Trump has been in office Kushner and his fellow real estate lawyer Jason Greenblatt have been shuttling between the White House and the region drawing up plans. Few details have leaked, but Washington gossip assumes it will be a less prescriptive version of the plan to see Israel and Palestine negotiate the borders of two states.

Kushner and Greenblatt initially made a good impression on leaders in the region, despite Palestinian fears that Trump is sympathetic to Israeli settlement building on occupied land. But America's unilateral decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital without the parties first agreeing a division of sovereignty in the holy city outraged Palestinians. Planned meetings with Pence were cancelled and, at the United Nations on Thursday Palestinian envoys tasted bitter victory when the world largely united to condemn Trump's position.

Peace parameters

"One hundred twenty-eight versus nine—that's a massive setback for the United States of America," Ambassador Riyad Mansour said, after the vote. But if the Palestinians are now hoping for a more convenable mediator, they stand to be disappointed. France—along with other key US allies like Britain, Turkey and Saudi Arabia—voted to censure Trump, but French envoy Ambassador Francois Delattre played down its importance.

"Today's resolution simply reaffirms the international law that applies to Jerusalem," he told reporters. "It is more important than ever to unite the international community behind agreed peace process parameters, including of course the United States," he said. Of Washington's mediation, the ambassador added: "Everyone knows the special role and weight they have in this dossier." So, however the Palestinians fell today after a rare procedural victory, next year they may find themselves obliged to engage with whatever new plan Kushner comes up with.

Makovsky argued that Trump had never ruled out a Palestinian capital in east Jerusalem, and said US officials should have gone on Arab television to explain this. "Look at what the guy said: that he wanted to leave this open to the parties to negotiate whatever sovereignty arrangements they want, including the religious sites," he argued. "So I wouldn't say this is dead and buried," he said. "My feeling is that if Kushner and Greenblatt actually put forward a peace plan in the first quarter of 2018, I think [the Palestinians] would have to take it seriously." —AFP

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