

Bush rules out no-war pact with North Korea

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, Oct. 19. The U.S. President, George W. Bush, today rejected the idea of a bilateral non-aggression pact with North Korea. "We will not have a treaty. That's off the table," he said at a photo session with the Thailand Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, in Bangkok. Mr. Bush arrived in Bangkok to participate in the two-day meeting beginning tomorrow of the leaders of the member-economies of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

Anti-war protesters and anti-globalisation activists took to

the streets in Bangkok to express their disapproval of Mr. Bush's policies in Iraq. Protest rallies had marked his visit to Tokyo and Manila as well during his tour of several countries of East Asia and Australia.

On the ways to resolve Pyongyang's nuclear-weapons 'programme', Mr. Bush said: "The burden is on North Korea, not on America. North Korea must get rid of [its] nuclear ambitions. .. in a verifiable way."

Saying there was a clear 'difference' between Iraq and North Korea, Mr. Bush said that "we have now got four other voices, besides ourselves, who say the same message to Mr. Kim Jong-il, and that is, dis-

Mr. Bush announced that the U.S. "is willing to grant [a] major non-NATO ally status to Thailand" in "important recognition" of its "strong support" in the anti-terror campaign. The offer outside the NATO framework is a relatively new aspect of U.S. diplomacy. He announced "the intention to begin negotiations on [a] free trade agreement" with Thailand. However, regional diplomats note that the Thaksin Government's proactive support for the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq has evoked opposition among significant sections of the population.

Mr. Bush's effort to humour Thailand comes in the wake of his gesture to the Philippines which he designated as "a major non-NATO ally" following the talks he held with the Filipino President, Gloria Arroyo, in Manila on Saturday.

Bush rebukes Taiwan over referendum

WASHINGTON, Dec. 9. — President George W Bush today rebuked Taiwan's President Chen Shui-bian over his plans for a referendum on Beijing's military threat, as he sat side by side with China's Premier Mr Wen Jiabao.

"We oppose any unilateral decision by either China or Taiwan to change the status quo," Mr Bush said when asked about a proposed 20 March referendum in Taiwan.

"And the comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the status quo, which we oppose," the US President also said.

Chen has argued that his proposed referendum falls short of any moves to

change the status quo on sovereignty between his nationalist island and the mainland, which regards Taiwan as a renegade province.

But Mr Bush's strong words, and the Oval Office setting of his remarks in talks with Wen, make it clear that Washington does not agree.

The United States, while a strong supporter of democratic Taiwan, which it is bound by law to defend, grants diplomatic recognition only to Beijing under the one-China policy.

US officials made it clear yesterday, before the talks, that their criticism of Taiwan should not be seen as a "green light" for Beijing to intimidate the island with its military buildup. — AFP

N Korea in touch, says Powell

WASHINGTON, Oct. 26. — North Korea has contacted the USA over an offer to give written security assurances in return for the communist state ending its nuclear weapons programme, secretary of state General Colin Powell said today.

He called it a positive sign, but warned that there were still “long days and nights” of negotiations ahead to end the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. “We would only enter into an agreement that can be verified,” he insisted. North Korea signalled a shift in stance on Saturday when it said it was ready to consider President George W Bush’s offer of written security guarantees in return for scrapping its nuclear weapons programme.

Gen. Powell said North Korean officials contacted US counterparts last Friday but did not say where. Normally the two sides carry out unofficial negotiations through their missions at the UN in New York.

He said that since the USA had said last year it had no intention of invading or attacking North Korea the two sides have been “doing diplomatic dances”. — AFP

Nuclear Korea has US in a tizzy

By Chidanand Rajghatta
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Washington: And then there were nine. North Korea has forced its way into the extended nuclear-weapons club, joining India, Pakistan and Israel and the permanent five.

The remote but belligerent country bluntly declared to the US that it possessed nuclear weapons, disclosed it was in the process of making several more, indicated that it might even go in for tests, and that Washington could do diddly-squat about all this.

The North Korean assertion came in Beijing during talks between US assistant secretary of state James Kelly and a senior North Korean representative, Gen Ri Gun, which was facilitated by China. The parleys were aimed at disarming North Korea, but instead, according to several accounts, Gen Ri took Mr Kelly aside and brusquely broke the news. The revelations, although expected, convulsed Washington.

President George W. Bush told NBC News in an interview that North Korea was "back to the old blackmail game", and he insisted that he would not be intimidated. "This will give us an opportunity to say to the North Koreans and the world we're not going to be threatened," Mr Bush said.

Separately, Secretary of State Colin Powell warned that North Korea should not leave the talks "with the slightest impression that the United States and its partners will be intimidated by bellicose statements or by threats or actions they think might get them more attention or might force us to make a concession that we

would not otherwise make. They would be very ill-advised to move in that direction".

Neither of them gave any indication of the next step although Mr Powell said all options were on the table, a euphemism for saying war was not ruled out. But the US dreads going to war against a nuclear-armed adversary because it would immediately threaten the existence of its allies—South Korea and Japan—and tens of thousands of US soldiers stationed in the region.

Although some in the administration like Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld are said to be itching to go the Iraq route, the dominant sentiment is to move cautiously against a maverick and unpredictable country.

US officials searched for hidden meanings and signals in the North Korean declaration, wondering if it was a bargaining or negotiating tactic. Some officials argued that Pyongyang merely wanted security guarantees and aid from the US to give up its nuclear ambitions.

But others said it was not a reliable promise, especially since Pyongyang had broken its word earlier. In recent days, the North Koreans have pointed to the Iraq example, saying they feel better off armed with nukes.

In any case, Washington is in an absolute tizzy because North Korea's move could end up unravelling the whole non-proliferation lockbox that the US has constructed over the past 35 years.

There are fears that Pyongyang could sell the bombs, the nuclear material, or the technology to other countries or organisations for cash.



Kim Il Jong



George W. Bush

Increased infiltration from Pak into J&K: US report

WASHINGTON, April 19. — Cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir has risen “sharply” in March, a trend expected to continue with increasing infiltration from Pakistan, the US Congressional Research Service has said, stressing that renewed terrorist activities have rekindled fears of an India-Pakistan conflict.

In another development, British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair told in an interview to *Friday Times* that ending cross-border infiltration of militants across the line of control is “essential” as violence would never solve the Kashmir dispute.

Levels of violence in Kashmir increased sharply in March, and it is “a trend that may continue with a spring thaw and ensuing infiltration across the LoC,” said the CRS, a group that advises members of the US Congress.

Other than sparking off a serious diplomatic row between New Delhi and Islamabad in February, CRS said, the

“new terrorist incidents have rekindled fears of direct conflict between South Asia’s nuclear neighbours.” India appears frustrated by the “perceived US double standard” in the war against terror and “find US calls for renewed India-Pakistan dialogue “inappropriate” in light of the “heinous terrorist attacks that have occurred” in Kashmir, the group said in its India Report issued on 8 April.

It also noted that the Indian government has called the US-led war in Iraq “unjustified” and “avoidable.” “Opposition parties, including the Congress, have been more forceful in their criticism. Also, opinion polls indicate that up to 90 per cent of Indians disapprove of the “unilateral” US action.

Other than the hostility between the two neighbours, there is another trend that is obvious: “India’s preoccupation with China as a potential long-term strategic threat,” the group said. — PTI

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U.S., South Korea to finetune military pact

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, APRIL 9. The future of the half-century-old military alliance between the United States and South Korea will be fine-tuned at a summit between the Presidents of the two countries next month. This was announced in Seoul today in the context of commencement of talks there between the representatives of South Korea and the U.S. on the "future of the alliance policy initiative".

The overall re-orientation or even the sustainable re-invention of this enduring alliance will be determined only at the summit between Roh Moo-hyun and George W. Bush, Presidents of South Korea and the U.S. respectively, on American soil in mid-May this year. Mr. Roh is scheduled to begin a week-long visit to the U.S. from May 11 in this connection.

A close examination of the U.S.-South Korean strategic alliance has been necessitated by North Korea's latest moves to 'nuclearise' itself and by the

long-term implications of the end of the Cold War over a decade ago as also the parallel significance of Washington's ongoing military involvement in Iraq, according to regional diplomats and analysts.

Given the urgency of such a reappraisal, as seen from both Seoul and Washington, the two sides have already begun the review that is expected to be completed well before the May summit.

In the more immediate context of North Korea's repeated acts of perceived "brinkmanship", the delegations of South Korea and the U.S. agreed, at their meeting in Seoul today, to "push for the re-location of the Yongsan garrison in central Seoul as soon as possible". While today's decision pertains only to a single U.S. garrison in South Korea, the sides agreed, at a broader level, to carry forward their discussion on the timing of the "overall re-alignment process" in a way that would not weaken their ability to deter the Democratic Peo-

ple's Republic of Korea (DPRK or the North), according to South Korea's Assistant Defence Minister for Policy, Cha Young-koo.

Meanwhile, a large number of South Korean legislators have indicated their intention to petition the Roh administration, through a campaign of 10-million signatures, to reconsider the issue of relocating the U.S. forces. About 37,000 U.S. military personnel are estimated to operate in the southern half of the Korean peninsula.

At the other end of the political spectrum within South Korea, the exercise to trim the U.S. strategic sails to the new winds of international politics is reckoned to be based on the twin principles of 'operability' of the USFK and its potency as a 'deterrent' to the DPRK's conventional and 'nuclear' capabilities. It is in this context that North Korea has again indicated that the entire South Korea is within the compass of Pyongyang's strategic radar (in both political and military senses).

1 0 APR 2003

SEE FINDC

N Korea, US inch towards conflict

London, April 6

WAR IN North Korea is now almost inevitable because of the country's diplomatic stalemate with America, a senior UN official claims.

Ahead of this week's crucial talks between members of the UN Security Council, Maurice Strong, special adviser to the Secretary General Kofi Annan, was gloomy on the chances of a peaceful settlement. "I think war is unnecessary, it's unthinkable and unfortunately it's entirely possible," he said.

Strong, who has just returned from a private mission for Annan in North Korea and is due to report to the United Nations officials in New York on Monday, said he felt both North Korea and America seemed to think they had time on their side but were both on a slide towards war.

On Wednesday, the United Nations Security Council will hear America's demand for sanctions against North Korea, which it accuses of planning to

develop nuclear weapons.

The Communist state has already said it would regard any such move as an "act of war" and further warned on Saturday that it would ignore any UN resolutions on the issue. It believes its dispute is solely with the US and wants direct talks with Washington — something the American government has refused to even consider.

"The nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula is not something that should be discussed at the United Nations," said the state KCNA news agency in Pyongyang.

North Korea believes it is next on America's list for pre-emptive strikes, says Strong. It takes George W. Bush's rhetoric in his "axis of evil" speech as a very real threat to its national security. The Bush administration says it seeks a diplomatic end, but has not ruled out a military solution.

"There is such a complete breakdown of trust and confidence between these two countries that they are now unable

to read the intentions of the other and this might escalate into conflict," Strong said.

He said the North Koreans were prepared for war but "anxious for peace".

The standoff between the two nations first flared in October when United States officials said North Korea had admitted having a secret nuclear programme in violation of a 1994 agreement. As punishment, Washington and its allies suspended promised oil shipments.

Meanwhile, North Korea on Saturday accused Japan of plotting a pre-emptive strike following recent calls from Tokyo to beef up the country's defence capabilities against the Communist nation.

Japan's Defence Minister Shigeru Ishiba said on Friday that his country had a right to launch a strike on foreign soil if an attack is deemed imminent.

In the last two months, Pyongyang has tested at least two short-range missiles.

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