

**Brig. (retd.) Naeem Salik**

### **Much fuss about nothing**

In the run up to next year's NPT Review Conference, the world nuclear order is in an acute state of flux and commotion. North Korea has rattled the world with yet another – anthis time successful – nuclear test. But for any discerning observer, this did not come as a shock, and has served to highlight the dangers inherent in the duplicitous and hypocritical policies followed by the powers that be. The six-party agreement had already stalled after North Korea took offence to the Security Council's reprimand, sanctions and condemnation over its missile test, which it claimed was an attempt to launch a satellite into orbit.

As a matter of fact there is no international law, treaty or agreement that prohibits testing of any kind of missiles by any state. India and Pakistan routinely test their missiles. The Russians have conducted several missile tests in recent months, and Israel and the United States regularly test their anti-ballistic missile systems. Then why censure the North Koreans alone?

The North Koreans may have been frustrated by the fact that, despite expectations, the Obama administration has not adopted a more benign and less belligerent posture towards it. So far, there have been no visible signs of any softening of US policy, which may well have caused irritation among the North Koreans.

However, in terms of defying international norms, North Korea has surpassed every other country. While India and Pakistan immediately pronounced unilateral moratoria on nuclear testing following their May 1998 tests, and have abstained from any further tests since, North Korea has repeated the feat twice in less than three years. The Kim regime's continued defiance of international norms may trigger a chain reaction among regional countries, especially South Korea and Japan (maybe even Taiwan), which will vitiate the security environment Northeast Asia.

Such an adverse outcome has forced the Russians to condemn the test and characterise it as a threat to regional security; the Chinese have also expressed serious concern.

The last NPT Review Conference in 2005 started without any agreed agenda and ended in acrimony due to serious differences between the US and Iran on the one hand and Middle Eastern countries, led by Egypt, and Israel on the other. This time around, prospects do not seem any better since the atmospherics appear even worse than 2005 due to the North Korean nuclear test and the ratcheting up of threats of an Israeli strike against Iranian nuclear facilities since the return of Benjamin Netanyahu to power.

Meanwhile, effects of the US-India nuclear agreement have already started to unfold; countries like Canada and Kazakhstan have agreed to sell large quantities of Uranium to India, and others such as France and Russia are also lining up to sell their nuclear technology to India. Once the floodgates are opened, it would be difficult to predict the extent of damage to the existing non-proliferation regime. The

US has no moral authority left now to lecture others to not reap the benefits of nuclear commerce, especially in the backdrop of international economic recession.

The North Korean test may also sound the death knell for the prospects of implementation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. US President Obama had expressed his intention to renew efforts to convince the US Senate to allow the ratification of the CTBT. The chances of his efforts succeeding now seem bleak given the fact that never before in its history has the Senate revoked its earlier decision to reject ratification of any agreement. The North Korean test will play right into the hands of the anti-CTBT lobby in the US and provide it with cogent reason to refuse to allow ratification of the treaty.

Last year, a quartet of former senior US officials, including Robert McNamara, Sam Nunn, William Perry and Henry Kissinger – who had wielded nuclear weapons to great effect during their heydays and are now in the twilight of their lives – made a passionate appeal for complete nuclear disarmament through a Global Zero Proposal. This proposal was later endorsed by President Obama himself, then a candidate for the White House.

Interestingly, however, the prevalent confusion in the US security establishment is manifest in a recently released report on 'US Strategic Posture' by a Congressional commission chaired by William Perry – one of the big four mentioned above. Among other recommendations, the Commission has called on the US to 'pursue an approach to reduce nuclear dangers that balances US deterrence, arms control, and non-proliferation interests'.

While calling for negotiating a successor to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), it also wants to preserve the 'resilience' and 'survivability' of US nuclear forces. While talking about the urgent need for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), it says in the same breath that "The United States requires a stockpile of nuclear weapons that is safe, secure, reliable, and credible." It has also recommended 'limited' deployment of ballistic missile defences as well as maintenance of the United States' extended deterrence umbrella for its allies. Global Zero is certainly not on the horizon, at least as far as this report is concerned.

There have been other related developments as well. Upset by the deployment of US ballistic missile defence systems and early warning radars ever closer to their borders, the Russians have threatened to resume modernisation of their nuclear arsenal and develop new missiles capable of defeating ballistic missile shields intended to be deployed by the US. In this backdrop, it is hard to imagine that the Russians would be agreeable to a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with the US.

Finally, the issue that has dominated the international, and especially the American, media in recent weeks has been the controversy surrounding the security of Pakistan's nuclear assets. The issue has raised its ugly head several times since 9/11.

This time around, however, the campaign was very well orchestrated and sustained. What were apparently causing anxiety and paranoia among the Americans were the gains being made by the Taliban in Pakistan's northwestern territories. The Bush-Cheney team and its neo-con cohorts may be

long gone from the corridors of power in Washington, but the US media has gotten so used to fear-mongering that its malady now appears incorrigible.

But there is a method to this madness. Some former Clinton administration officials who have made insinuations against Pakistan's nuclear management in the past through articles commissioned by Centre for Advanced Study of India (CASI) at the University of Pennsylvania have now found their way into circles close to the US president. These officials will instinctively indulge in Pakistan bashing.

Second, it is not just a coincidence that the current phase of this campaign to malign Pakistan commenced at a time when the Kerry-Lugar Bill was sailing through the Congress and anti-Pakistan lobbies were unable to find a way to block it. They found it expedient to raise fears about Pakistan's imminent collapse and by implication the danger of Pakistan's nuclear assets falling into wrong hands. Scary stories were floated of the Taliban being just a hundred kilometres away from the capital Islamabad, and by implication close to laying their hands on the Pakistani nukes.

A glance at the map of Pakistan would show that the country's maximum depth at many places and Islamabad is half as distant from the Line of Control in Kashmir than it is from Swat. Dare I suggest that readers pick up a map of Israel and measure the distance between Dimona, home to the Negev Nuclear Research Centre, and Hamas-controlled Gaza or Fatah-controlled Hebron, and the nearest Jordanian and Egyptian towns? My measurement suggests it is anywhere between 40-60 kilometres. Then why all this fuss about the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons?

No one should be under any illusion about Pakistan's capacity or resolve to defend its nuclear capability, which has been acquired through tremendous sacrifices by the nation.

*Brig (retd) Naeem Salik is an Islamabad-based security analyst*

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