

China backs DPRK sanctions

By Zhang Yuwei – March 8, 2013

The United Nations Security Council on Thursday unanimously adopted a resolution with tough new sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for the nuclear-weapon test the country carried out last month.

The resolution is the 15-member council's fifth involving the DPRK since 2006. It imposes additional financial curbs on the isolated state, such as blocking transactions that could aid its nuclear and ballistic-missile activity, prohibiting bulk transfers of cash, restricting access to Pyongyang's financial sector and barring exports of luxury goods to elites in the country.

The new sanctions are legally binding on all nations, superseding earlier sanctions that were only voluntary.

The resolution was proposed by the United States and reportedly was the product of three weeks of consultation with fellow council members, particularly China, over the document's wording. A closed-door meeting on Tuesday indicated preliminary approval of the text.

Li Baodong, China's permanent representative to the UN, said that while it was "an important step" for the council to approve the new sanctions, "adoption of the resolution itself is not enough". He added that China wants "full implementation".

"This resolution is a very important step, but one step cannot make a journey," Li told reporters after Thursday's council vote. "We need a comprehensive strategy to bring the situation back to dialogue. We need wisdom, persistence, perseverance.

"We want to see full implementation of the resolution," the Chinese diplomat said, urging resumption of the long-stalled Six-Party Talks aimed at "denuclearizing" the Korean Peninsula.

The talks were a series of negotiations launched in August 2003 with the goal of ending the DPRK's nuclear program. The six parties are China, the US, the Republic of Korea, the DPRK, Japan and Russia. Due to a diplomatic standoff between Washington and Pyongyang, the discussions stopped after the latter quit the process in 2009.

On Friday in Pyongyang, state media carried a threat that the DPRK would cancel its hotline and a nonaggression pact with the Republic of Korea and reiterated a warning that it will launch pre-emptive nuclear strikes on the US.

Earlier this week, the government said it would cancel the armistice that effectively ended the Korean War in 1953.

The DPRK conducted its third nuclear test on Feb 12 - the first definitive missile test carried out since Kim Jong-un inherited power in late 2011 upon the death of his father Kim Jong-il.

The country launched two other missiles, in 2006 and 2009, drawing condemnation from around the world.

In December, the DPRK launched into orbit an Earth-observation satellite that international observers, including UN member governments, classified as involving a ballistic missile.

In Beijing, Chinese officials expressed support for the Security Council's action, describing the resolution as "balanced".

It is in international community's fundamental interest to safeguard peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in northeast Asia, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said on Thursday.

"The extensive cooperation between Washington and Beijing on this latest measure reflects China's growing frustration with Pyongyang's unpredictable, disruptive behavior," said Ted Galen Carpenter, senior fellow for defense and foreign-policy studies at the Cato Institute.

"It is a clear warning to the North Korean government that China is concerned about the potential for a major crisis in East Asia that such behavior could trigger," he added.

Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the UN, said adoption of the latest resolution reflected the Security Council's commitment to ridding the Korean Peninsula of nuclear arms.

"The strength, breadth, and severity of these sanctions will raise the cost to North Korea of its illicit nuclear program and further constrain its ability to finance and source materials and technology for its ballistic missile, conventional and nuclear weapons programs," Rice told reporters after the vote.

"Taken together, these sanctions will bite and bite hard," she said.

The council also banned exports of luxury goods to the DPRK - specifying items such as jewelry, yachts and sports cars.

The new resolution also imposes new travel restrictions, requiring countries to bar travel of any of its citizens working for companies that have been found to be assisting the DPRK in its weapons programs.

"If a country has cargo on its territory that might be carrying prohibitive items, like conventional arms or nuclear or ballistic materials, this resolution requires that the cargo be inspected," Rice said.

The Cato Institute's Carpenter said the latest UN sanctions will further impede the DPRK's already-limited economic activity, bringing "additional inconvenience" to Kim and the country's elite.

"If the portion of the resolution on the inspection of suspicious cargo leads to interceptions on the high seas, there could be some very unpleasant and dangerous incidents," he said.

"That provision is based on the faulty assumption that increasing the DRPK's economic isolation will lead to capitulation on the nuclear and missile issues.

"The principal effect, though, will be to worsen the meager standard of living of the North Korean people, not to change the regime's behavior significantly - especially regarding the high-priority nuclear program," Carpenter said. Pyongyang could become even more "uncooperative and shrill", he said.

"The recent threat to abandon the armistice is typical of what we may expect," he said.

Zhu Zhiqun, a professor of political science and international relations at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, said the sanctions will likely "raise its (the DPRK's) bellicose rhetoric", causing the country to "become even more defiant".

Even with the new sanctions, "it remains questionable how they will be enforced and verified".

"The DPRK does not operate, and will not open soon, many branch banks and other financial institutions abroad, so it is almost meaningless to call on other states to prohibit the DPRK from operating its banks and financial institutions in their countries," he said.