
A new phase of diplomacy?

By Mohammad Akef Jamal, Special to Gulf News

01/07/2007

The UN Security Council resolution 1737 is not a very harsh one. It was imposed on Iran for pursuing a clandestine nuclear programme with the total conviction of the international community that sanctions will be futile. China and Russia believe that imposing "limited" sanctions on Iran will help in continuing diplomatic efforts related to the Iranian nuclear programme. It also seems that, for the time being, the US does not want to step up the confrontation with Iran, the reason perhaps lies in the Iraq Study Group recommendations which pointed to the important role that Iran can play in stabilising Iraq.

Placing Iran under an economic embargo will increase the power of the hardliners who in turn may force the regime to manufacture nuclear weapons. Although the US exerted its pressure on the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on North Korea, in October, followed by Iran in December, there is a fundamental difference in the nuclear programmes pursued by the two countries.

Iran is still a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, while North Korea withdrew from it in 2003 and has cut ties with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Iran, on the other hand, insists that its nuclear programme is specifically for peaceful purpose.

After being termed as part of the "axis of evil", along with Iraq and North Korea, the Iranian leadership has strong reasons to fear the US presence on its western and eastern borders in Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran is also completely convinced that the US wants to change its political system. Therefore, it seeks to use its nuclear programme as a protective shield. Tedious negotiations In the light of this equation, Tehran is still drawn to diplomacy. Long months of tedious negotiations went by, wherein thousands of precious hours were wasted by prominent European negotiators who tried to convince Iran to give up its uranium enrichment activities, to no avail.

The US incentives basket that was put on the negotiation table failed to change the Iranian stand on its nuclear programme. Iran disregarded all international calls in this respect, the last of which was ignoring the August 31 deadline set to cease the enrichment of uranium.

During the negotiations, Iran was intent on buying time and multiplying its efforts to hasten its nuclear programme as a fait accompli.

And while Iran invited all nations to dismantle their nuclear programmes and weapons to enhance its overt stance, it refrained from inviting severe measures against North Korea. Moreover, it was also the only country which did not condemn the atomic test conducted by the communist nation and called it as a reaction to the US threats.

On the other hand, the Iranian nuclear programme poses a great source of concern to the West, especially the US which considers Tehran as a big threat to its new Middle East policy.

Washington fears that its policy will fail, unless Tehran has a political regime which will accept the US agenda or does not oppose it, in the least. In the US perception, the Iranian nuclear programme is more dangerous than others because of the horizons it opens up for Iran to become a distinguished force in the region.

Iran is an oil rich country, literally floating on oil, while North Korea is a poor country that can hardly feed its citizens.

External pressures Iran is used to confront external pressures with relaxed reactions. And after the Security Council issued its 1737 resolution, which does not touch Iran's economic interests, its reaction will not differ than its usual cool one.

Despite Iran not paying heed to the UN Security Council resolution and its

insistence on continuing with its nuclear programme and re-evaluating its relation with the IAEA, it is far-fetched that Tehran will follow the path of North Korea.

Dr Mohammad Akef Jamal is an Iraqi writer based in Dubai.
