

'You cannot expect all from the Sec

In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon discusses the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programmes, UN reform and the role of the secretary general in the modern era. Here are the excerpts:

Q: Is the UN role on North Korea dependent on the participation of China?

A: The North Korean issue has been going on since the early 1990s. The second nuclear test and missile launches are very threatening and alarming. North Korean rhetoric has also caused increased tension among the countries of the region. It also affects negatively the global, nuclear non-proliferation efforts. The Security Council is looking at how it can stop proliferation from North Korea. So the Council is asking that all member states inspect North Korean cargo on the international high seas. This is a significantly strong measure. We will see how this will be implemented.

China has traditionally and until today been playing a very important role in taking a unified position in the Security Council. China has played a very positive, flexible and constructive position.

Q: In the past, China hadn't taken advantage of its geo-political position in respect to North Korea. North Korea has been trying to maintain the US-Pyongyang dialogue, rather than a regional dialogue and China hasn't done enough to dissuade North Korea from thinking that way.

A: My observation is China is thinking more as a global player than regionally, in both politics and economics. Therefore I think we can expect a more positive role to be played by China on global issues.

Q: What do you think is actually transpiring in North Korea? Is this a sign that there is generational change? Does it have more to do with internal politics than external appearances?

A: We need to look at different dimensions. North Korea has not changed. They have always taken a hard line. They have always made threats against South Korea and countries in the region, and now the whole world through detonating two nuclear bombs. Domestically their economy has been terribly in shambles and now it seems to be the case that they are looking seriously at a power transition. It seems to be the case that Kim Jong Il is now looking at the possibility of handing over power to his youngest son, who is not experienced at all. How this succession process develops is something we have to

carefully watch. I don't have any answer at this time. Why North Korea has been taking a very belligerent and hard line position most recently, even though President Obama has reached out for dialogue seems to be related to power succession.

Q: What do you think North Korea's response will be to the Security Council's measures? They have made very bellicose statements, suggesting that it will behave badly. What do you think will happen?

A: I suspect North Korea will react very negatively. I'm not quite sure what kind of action they may take. When the Security Council reacted with a presidential statement (in April) about the missile launch they reacted very negatively by demanding an apology, which was just nonsense. It was an unacceptable demand. Their nuclear test was an answer because the Security Council didn't

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apologise. This is something which we cannot understand in the normal sense. I'm considering what the international community, including myself, can do to de-escalate the tensions.

Q: Do you think this kind of craziness in North Korea, as you say this completely illogical stuff, is calculated?

A: I think so. It must be that they are thinking in their own strategic way.

Q: Do you have any doubt that Iran is trying to build a bomb?

A: If the international community does not properly resolve this issue, it will create a serious crisis like we are now seeing with North Korea. Therefore, my dialogue with the Europeans and Americans has always been to encourage them to continue (with diplomacy). Meeting with Iranian authorities, such as President Ahmadinejad and the foreign minister, I told them they have the right under Article 4 of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty to have the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. So why has the international community had such a deep concern, and why has the Security Council passed three sanctions resolutions? That is because the international community cannot have any confidence and trust on (Iran's) side. So (Iran) must make it transparent and accountable and join this additional protocol of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguard agreement.

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authorities on many occasions. Their final conclusion was that they were not able to determine exactly the possibilities of the nuclear activities. Therefore I am still urging the Americans, as President Obama said in his recent Cairo speech the willingness to reach out to the Iranians. And they must seize this opportunity.

I had a very long discussion with President Ahmadinejad, most recently at the Geneva racism conference. I put all the issues on the table at it took 75 minutes. It was a very long discussion. I was quite straight and direct. I raised of course the nuclear issues and others, like the denial of the Holocaust or wiping of Israel from the map. On all these issues I really wanted to make a very clear and direct state-

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ment to President Ahmadinejad. I will continue to do that, whether they like it or not. On certain occasions he agreed. On the denial of the Holocaust and wiping of Israel from the world map he listened to my advice but still I'm puzzled he is still continuing. But when I spoke clearly he changed his statement to the conference. He sent his foreign minister to me who told me that based on what I said he decided to change his statement. In fact he did not read out his denial of the Holocaust.

Q: Is part of the issue the UN itself and its role being less important?

A: There should be a clear understanding what kind of a role do you expect, and what kind of a role the United Nations should play at this time, in the 21st century. Your philosophical views of the United Nations may be still like in the 1960s, '70s or '80s at the latest. Your view of the United Nations is not 21st century.

During the Cold War era, the United Nations might have been the only and most universal organisation in the international community. But you are still looking at the early stage of that time of the United Nations. Now you have the European Union, African Union and League of Arab States and many regional and sub-regional and quite big organisations. There are many actors now. It used to be the United States and the Soviet Union until lately. Now you have all the European leaders, Germans, French, the European Commission. Many other European powers with quite high economic development. The European Union has now emerged as a political player, a global player.

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I am not a national leader. If I am a national leader I can speak out all that I want. You are sovereign. Being sovereign you are exempted from all this criticism. You may be criticised by national people, voters. But me as a secretary general, you should have a clear understanding where you put the secretary general and what kind of a role do you expect from him. There are clear limitations.

Q: How do you see the role of the secretary general in the 21st century?

A: Well, there are many areas where I can't do, where even the Americans can not do. I'm not supposed to be responsible for anything happens in Afghanistan and Pakistan - all this political situation. But we are concentrating on how can we mobilise humanitarian assistance for all these affected people, displaced persons. We have no peacekeepers in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The whole dynamics have changed.

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But I appreciate the expectation of the international community on the UN. In the Korean programme in the 1950 it took two or three days when UN forces landed in Pusan, South Korea. When the UN got involved in the Congo in the 1960s, it took two weeks for UN peacekeepers to be deployed by my predecessor Dag Hammarskjöld, who was killed while going there. These days when you have so many conflicts around the world, particularly in Africa, the number of countries have increased, the number of global issues have increased. There was no such global-warming crisis, food crisis, no energy crisis requiring the United Nations to be involved. Today peacekeeping it takes a minimum of two years.

Even in Darfur, we have not been able to complete (deployment) even after four years. And during my two and a half years. But this year I am going to complete deployment of 26,000. Therefore while the expectations and number of crises and challenges have increased, the resources and political will of the member states have decreased. It is not the United Nations when there were 50 members. One-hundred-and-ninety-two states always insist to enjoy their sovereign rights, rather than being a member of the United Nations where they have to be flexible to abide by all these resolutions.

You have seen North Korea, you have seen Iran, you have seen many countries who have not implemented Security Council resolutions, which are binding. There really isn't any forceful enforcement capacity of the United Nations, legally speaking. That's why President Bush took that action by creating multinational forces in Iraq because the Security Council was divided. So all this kind of blame and criticism comes to the Secretary General, that the UN is not able to address these issues. I want you to understand.

Q: On Sri Lanka. I'd be interested to hear your view about what you accomplished on Sri Lanka.

A: If you look at my timing of my visit to Sri Lanka you may argue that I was there after everything had finished. A long time before this crisis began I have been urging the Sri Lanka government to protect the civilian population, not to use heavy weapons. I have been talking to them all the time. Sometimes I issued a strong statement, urging and criticising them. On my visit, first of all I called for unimpeded access to internally displaced camps. That has been done. Then (the Sri Lankan president) assured me that 80 percent of these people would be resettled by the end of this year. It was very difficult to agree with him on a joint communique. I conveyed the importance of full accountability, taking into consideration the view of the international community and non-governmental organisations. I strongly urged them that before there was an external imposition on them to be committed to accountability. In the end (the Sri Lankan president) agreed to full accountability and I am sure he will take action soon.

Q: At least 10,000 civilians died. Wouldn't it have made a difference if you had made public statements while the killing was going on as opposed to a joint communique after the fact?

A: That's what I said. Whatever the number may be, it was totally unacceptable. Unfortunately there was a high number of civilian casualties. At this time I would like to make it quite clear that there were some allegations that the United Nations closed our eyes to this [reported figure of] 20,000 civilian casualties and tried to underestimate this number. First of all that is totally not true. We have never done that. I should not be responsible for that. It's totally not true. Whatever the number might be, this is an unacceptable one. In these extreme conditions, it was not possible to know the exact number of people who had been killed. That is what I can tell you at this time. ■