UN's Failure on North Korea

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With every passing day, the United Nations is becoming more useless in helping to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis. Tough rhetoric and a series of resolutions from the UN Security Council ramping up economic sanctions on the North Korean regime have failed to slow down North Korea’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. This was evidenced again last Friday by North Korea’s second ICBM launch, following its first on July 4th. The missile involved in the latest test is said to be capable of reaching as far as the eastern portion of the United States, although there have been some reports of re-entry problems.

Shortly after the July 4th ICBM test launch, the UN Security Council held an emergency session. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley said she expected a tough new Security Council draft resolution to be completed in a matter of days. Four weeks and another ICBM missile launch later, there is still no draft. While a UN ambassador from one of the permanent members of the Security Council told me that negotiations on another sanctions resolution were still ongoing, the ambassador did not hold out much hope for reaching consensus on tough new measures anytime soon.

No wonder the Trump administration is skeptical that the UN can produce anything useful to deter North Korea.

Following North Korea’s second ICBM launch last Friday, Ambassador Haley issued a statement declaring that holding another emergency session of the UN Security Council would be a waste of time. “An additional Security Council resolution that does not significantly increase the international pressure on North Korea is of no value,” Ambassador Haley said. “In fact, it is worse than nothing, because it sends the message to the North Korean dictator that the international community is unwilling to seriously challenge him.”

No longer counting on multilateral UN sanctions or China’s intervention, President Trump is prepared to go it alone, or work with allies in the region such as Japan and South Korea, in dealing with the rogue regime. He told a reporter during the public portion of a cabinet meeting on Monday: “We will handle North Korea. We are gonna be able to handle them. It will be handled. We handle everything.”

The Trump administration is demonstrating some military muscle to back up President Trump’s words. It successfully tested the THAAD missile defense system in the Pacific Ocean on Sunday. This was part of an effort “to stay ahead of the evolving threat,” said the U.S. Missile Defense Agency director, Lt. Gen. Sam Greaves. The test followed the dispatch of two B-1 bombers from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam Saturday over the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. and South Korea also conducted joint ballistic missile drills. Lt. Gen. Thomas Vandal, who commands the U.S. Eighth Army unit of U.S. Forces Korea, said: “I assure you we are ready to fight tonight, will deter North Korean provocations and if necessary defend the Republic of Korea.”

China issued a condemnation of North Korea’s ICBM missile launch, as it has done previously with other provocative actions by the North Korean regime.  “China is opposed to North Korea’s launch activities in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions and against the will of the international community,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said. However, China put the onus back on the United States to resolve its differences with North Korea

through dialogue and negotiations.

Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations, Liu Jieyi, rejected the notion that China should be responsible for reining in North Korea. He told reporters on Monday that it was up to the United States and North Korea, not China, to reduce tensions in the region. The United States and North Korea “hold the primary responsibility to keep things moving, to start moving in the right direction, not China,” Ambassador Liu said. “No matter how capable China is, China’s efforts will not yield practical results because it depends on the two principal parties.”

Ambassador Liu blamed the U.S. deployment of the THAAD missile defense system in South Korea for having a “negative impact on the strategic stability of the region.” He also said that unilateral sanctions and “preconditions put to starting the dialogue” with North Korea were hampering the successful implementation of the Security Council’s existing resolutions.

“China has been implementing the (U.N.) resolutions in good faith, in the comprehensive way,” Ambassador Liu added, “and we urge other countries to do so. The fact that the resolutions are not so far implemented in the comprehensive and precise way says a lot about the kind of difficulties that we face at the moment.”

Ambassador Liu reiterated China’s proposal, supported also by Russia, calling for North Korea to freeze its nuclear bomb and ballistic missile testing in exchange for a freeze by the U.S. and South Korea of their joint military exercises. The freeze exchange would be accompanied by resumption of negotiations aimed at achieving denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and “a peace and security mechanism” put in place for the two Korean nations. Unconditional resumption of negotiations with North Korea and the freeze exchange proposal remain in all likelihood non-starters for the United States.

Ambassador Liu claimed that he remains in daily contact with Ambassador Haley in an effort to come up with a new mutually acceptable Security Council resolution. However, six rounds of increasingly tougher UN multilateral sanctions against North Korea have not worked. Expecting a different outcome this time falls under the definition of insanity generally attributed to Albert Einstein: “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”