

No Move Yet by U.N. Body After Test by Koreans
By Rich Gladstone
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The international expressions of anger and dismay that followed North Korea's announcement of a nuclear test a few weeks ago, punctuated by a United Nations Security Council pledge to immediately work on "appropriate measures" in a new resolution, appear to have given way to slow-motion diplomacy and some frustration that not even a draft has been circulated among the Council's 15 members.

United Nations diplomats privately said the process had become bogged down mainly over bridging differences between China and the United States about how forcefully to respond, in some ways replicating a pattern that has prevailed in deliberations taken previously in dealing with North Korea's defiant tests of ballistic missiles and nuclear devices.

The frustration level, diplomats say, has been most prominent in South Korea, which has just sworn in a new leader, President Park Geun-hye. The frustration has been amplified because North Korea's announcement of a nuclear test on Feb. 12, its third, coincided with South Korea's turn as president of the Security Council under a monthly rotation system, giving South Korea a powerful measure of control over setting its priorities.

There had been hope in South Korea that a forceful Security Council resolution, expanding the economic penalties already in place against North Korea, would be completed and presented for a vote before South Korea relinquishes the presidential gavel at the end of Thursday to Russia, the Council president for March.

But given the lack of progress, that prospect appears unlikely, diplomats said. And Russia, like China, appears in no hurry to take action that, in its view, would only further antagonize North Korea and destabilize the Korean Peninsula. "The South Koreans would like to see a resolution during their tenure," one diplomat said.

Members of the South Korean Mission to the United Nations did not respond to telephone messages or e-mails regarding the status of a North Korean resolution.

North Korea has said it would regard any new Security Council resolution as a provocation. Since the Feb. 12 test, the North has threatened to conduct more tests, promulgated video propaganda showing President Obama covered in fire, and vowed a "miserable destruction" of American and South Korean forces should they proceed with planned joint military exercises in March.

China has shown increasing impatience with North Korea, a destitute nation that depends on China for vital economic aid and trade. But on Tuesday China signaled its cautious approach on a Security Council resolution. A Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, was quoted by the official Xinhua News Agency as saying the Council's discussions "should be conducive to the denuclearization of the peninsula as well as peace and stability in northeast Asia."

Xinhua said the spokeswoman was responding to comments made earlier by Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, who was quoted as saying in Moscow that any Security Council resolution "must confirm that negotiations are the only choice for the parties involved."

There has been no public indication that China would be willing to expand the sanctions against North Korea, which cover military and dual-use goods, as well as luxury items for the elite. Nor has China given any indication that it would be willing to stop trade that helps keep its longtime ally afloat.

Diplomats and scholars of China-North Korea history say that although China increasingly regards North Korea as intransigent, it does not wish to take any steps that would collapse North Korea's government.

Many expect to see another Security Council resolution, which may have the appearance of consequences, but nothing that China would regard as destabilizing. No clues have emerged on whether North Korea used plutonium or uranium to fuel the recent blast. The impoverished state is rich in uranium deposits, and a switch to that fuel in theory could speed the expansion of its arsenal since Western intelligence officials believe that its plutonium supplies are limited.

In the two weeks since the underground test, Western states and a United Nations agency have monitored winds for signs of radioactive seepage that might answer the question. No finds have yet been reported.