

Archive

S. Korean FM: Nuclear Talk Prospects 'Not Bright'

October 30, 2009 09:33 AM

South Korea's foreign minister has sounded a note of urgency about stalled talks on North Korea's nuclear disarmament. While speculation percolates that North Korea may conduct a nuclear test, Seoul says it is preparing for "all possibilities."

S. Korean FM Ban Ki-moon talks to reporters during his press conference in Seoul

South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon says the process of resolving the North Korean nuclear issue peacefully and diplomatically is in a "critical phase". In comments Wednesday, he said the chances of resuming multi-national arms talks are "not bright."

"North Korea should realize the current situation in which the six-party talks are not taking place cannot go on aimlessly, and should stop hanging on to unreasonable allegations," he said. "I can tell you that our government is reviewing measures with all possibilities in mind."

Mr. Ban did not elaborate on what specific possibilities the South Korean government is discussing. News media have recently reported on U.S. intelligence concerns that the North may be preparing to test a nuclear device, but South Korea says it has seen no signs a test is imminent.

Information about North Korea's nuclear activities is extremely limited, and analysts warn the North may choose to choreograph movements on the ground for U.S. spy satellites to alarm Washington and its allies.

Nearly a year has passed since the last round of disarmament talks involving North Korea, the United States, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China. Since

then, Pyongyang has declared it has nuclear weapons and is making more, despite several past agreements to remain nuclear free.

On Sunday, a North Korean spokesman called President Bush a "hooligan" and ruled out any return to the six-party talks during his term. The same day, Pyongyang test fired a short-range missile off its eastern shore - a move South Korean officials, however, say should not be connected to the nuclear issue.

The United States has repeatedly responded to North Korean complaints that it has a "hostile attitude" by saying it has no intention of attacking North Korea. Washington says that giving up its nuclear ambitions could lead to the security guarantees and economic assistance Pyongyang wants.

Many South Korean experts, including government officials, say privately they doubt North Korea will test a nuclear weapon, because it would galvanize world sentiment against Pyongyang. The isolated Stalinist government is trying hard to feed its people but to continue receiving aid it needs acceptance from the international community.

They say North Korea probably wants to hold on to its nuclear weapons, because it is the only card it has left for international leverage.

RELATED STORIES

Archive

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty a Success, But Faces Key Challenges

One-hundred-87 countries have signed and ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or NPT, the legal cornerstone of non-proliferation efforts. Three countries: India, Pakistan and Israel, have not signed the treaty and a fourth, North Korea, has withdrawn from it. The treaty was opened for signature in 1968, and entered into force two years later. In 1995, the member states agreed to extend the treaty indefinitely. William Potter is the director for non...

Archive

Rice: US Can Deter North Korean Nuclear Ambitions

Condoleezza Rice U.S. Secretary of State
Condoleezza Rice, in a tough statement aimed at North Korea, says the United States has significant deterrent capability to thwart Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. Secretary Rice discussed North Korea's nuclear program the day after Pyongyang apparently launched a...