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The nuclear crisis in North Korea

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On 5th of October 2002, the United States announced that North Korea had revived its nuclear programme. A few days later, during the visit of the Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific affairs, James Kelly, the country admitted the existence of a nuclear programme. A few months after 10th of January, North Korea decided to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which marked the beginning of a major nuclear crisis since it signed the framework agreement with the United States in October 1994 in Geneva.

From the outset, North Korea reiterated that a solution for this crisis can only be found through direct negotiations with the United States and that nothing is more important than the signing of a Treaty of Non-Aggression with the United States guaranteeing the security of its regime. However, the United States is stubbornly refusing any negotiation with North Korea, preferring the UN Security Council to handle the North Korean issue.

Nevertheless, until recently, the United States confirmed that unlike Iraq, the North Korean case would be dealt with using peaceful measures. According to analysts, this difference in attitude can be explained by the fact that expansionism is not on North Korea's agenda. Its survival is its main problem; North Korea does not have petrol and the countries in the region that are directly concerned (China, Japan, Russia and South Korea) are all hostile to American bombardment.

Since the beginning of March, President Bush's attitude seemed to have changed. While emphasising that he favours the diplomatic approach, there is no denying that he has also considered the military approach, as confirmed by the deployment of the B52 and B51 bombers and the aircraft-carrier movement. Certain specialists even believe that the president has had enough of North Korea, which he has labelled "an axis of evil", especially as it is dangerously asking for trouble by testing missiles.

This crisis naturally presents a threat to South Korea, to such an extent that the new President, Roh Moo-hyun, who is nevertheless in favour of pursuing the reconciliation policy with North Korea, categorically condemns North Korea's nuclear ambition. For him, the faintest suspicion that North Korea wishes to equip itself with nuclear weapons threatens peace in the Korean Peninsula, North-East Asia and the world and it should therefore abandon any nuclear development project. The entire population supports this warning and the people are convinced that the possession of nuclear weapons could lead to the end the Korean nation.

The Koreans, however, are disappointed that President Bush has rejected President Clinton's recommendation to pursue negotiations with North Korea, thus breaking the reconciliation policy momentum between the two Korean countries because according to the Secretary of State, Mrs. Madeleine Albright, who visited Pyongyang in October 1999, the issue was close to being resolved.