

North Korea, Venezuela Move to Advance Military Strength

Contributed by Josh Dirkse

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld reacted last Tuesday to threatening steps by thwarted enemies North Korea and Venezuela to advance their armaments cache.

North Korea vowed to test a nuclear bomb in the near future, citing Iran's struggle for nuclear enrichment and the threat of impending sanctions. Six allied countries met Monday, in London to discuss an economic and political award package for a halt to the country's uranium enrichment proceedings. If Iran doesn't accept the package, sanctions may be imposed on the country.

The talks of the nuclear test came nearly three months after North Korea fired a handful of missiles on July 4th. North Korea says that it is adamant in denuclearization of its Korean peninsula, but will remain vigilant in advancing nuclear armaments as a defense against a possible U.S attack.

"The U.S. extreme threat of a nuclear war and sanctions and pressure compel the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea [North Korea]) to conduct a nuclear test, an essential process for bolstering nuclear deterrent, as a self-defense measure in response," said North Korea's Foreign Minister on state-owned television. Regardless of North Korea's claim to seek and end "hostile relations" with the United States, Rumsfeld and Rice offered cautioning responses. "They are an active proliferator," Rumsfeld said. "And were they to test and were they then to proliferate those technologies we'd be living with a proliferator and obviously we'd be living in a somewhat different world." Rice, in Cairo, Egypt, said that North Korea's statements were "a very provocative act." "A North Korean nuclear test would create a qualitatively different situation on the Korean peninsula," Rice said. "I think that you would see that a number of states in the region would need to reassess where they are now with North Korea." As Rice alluded to, East Asian countries responded to the attacks as well. Japan called the announcement "totally unforgivable". China's U.N. Ambassador will look to assemble a group, including North Korea, similar to the London-Six to assess the threat in and move towards total denuclearization.

Venezuela Increases Arms Rumsfeld spent the Tuesday in meetings in Managua, Nicaragua with an assembly of South and Central American Foreign Ministers. Outside of conference proceedings, Rumsfeld commented on Venezuela's bulking of military armaments and crafts, particularly weapons, jets and helicopters. "I don't know of anyone threatening Venezuela, anyone in the hemisphere," Rumsfeld said in response to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's claims that the U.S government is generating plans to assassinate him or aid in the toppling of his regime. The build-up comes two weeks after Chavez visited the United States and addressed the U.N. His speeches, one before the Security Council, and the other in a New York church, generated controversy when he called President George W. Bush "the devil" and "Lucifer". Rumsfeld also addressed the genuine fear of Venezuela's neighboring countries over the arms purchase, nearly \$3 billion worth from Russia, as they fear the weapons may end up in the hands of dangerous terrorists. Though the threats have yet to become imminent, most South and Central American governments saw a need for regional military organization. Nicaragua's military commander General Moises Omar Hallesleven said that Venezuela has a "very weak influence" in the region.