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I. United States

1. DPRK Multilateral Talks Agreement

Agence France-Presse ("NORTH KOREA DROPS DEMANDS, AGREES TO NUKE TALKS," 08/01/03) reported that the DPRK has dropped its demand for one-on-one negotiations with the US and has directly notified key regional players that it is ready to meet them in six-way nuclear crisis talks, ROK officials said. The ROK, Japan, the US, Russia and the PRC received notifications at about the same time from the DPRK, whose latest move triggered optimism that a breakthrough in the nine-month nuclear stand-off was at hand. A senior US official said talks could take place as early as this month. The US State Department said it was "very encouraged" by the development, and Moscow's Deputy Foreign Minister Yury Fedotov said the move "opens the way to a resolution" of the nuclear impasse. Japanese leaders welcomed signs that the DPRK was finally showing flexibilty while the ROK foreign ministry said months of tough diplomacy may at last be paying off. ROK officials said

the DPRK state had abandoned, at least for now, its long-standing demand for one-on-one talks with the US and was ready to engage directly in six-party talks without a resumption of exploratory three-party talks held in Beijing in April. Officials said details were sketchy but it appeared the DPRK had also dropped all reference to a non-aggression pact, one of the country's key demands since the nuclear crisis erupted in October last year. "North Korea expressed its intention to accept six-party talks directly without going through three-way talks or bilateral talks," Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Soo-Hyuk told a news briefing here. No date for talks has been fixed, he said, but the venue looked highly likely to be Beijing. He said the DPRK had attached no conditions to participation in the talks. Experts said they expected talks to go ahead soon but cautioned against undue optimism about swift progress.

2. US Bush on DPRK Talk Agreement

Reuters (Steve Holland, "BUSH CALLS N.KOREA AGREEMENT FOR TALKS POSITIVE," Washington, 08/01/03) reported that US President George W. Bush on Friday welcomed the DPRK's agreement to hold talks with the US and four other nations, and officials held out the possibility of aid if the DPRK abandoned its bid for nuclear weapons. "It's very clear to North Korea that if they end once and for all, in a verifiable and irreversible way, their nuclear weapons program, that they stand to realize a lot of benefits from the international community. But they need to take that step first," said White House spokesman Scott McClellan. North Korea agreed to talks with the US, the PRC, the ROK, Japan and Russia. They are expected to be held in September, possibly in Beijing.

Agence France-Presse ("WHITE HOUSE CONFIRMS AGREEMENT WITH NORTH KOREA ON TALKS," Washington, 08/01/03) reported that the DPRK has agreed to take part in multilateral talks to try to settle the crisis sparked by its nuclear program, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "North Korea has agreed to the multilateral approach that we long sought. That will include six-party talks," McClellan told reporters. "In terms of the actual details and timing, these are still being worked out with our friends and allies," he added. "We intend to continue working closely with other parties to make sure that North Korea completely, visibly and irreversibly eliminates its nuclear weapons program and begins to move to a more normal relationship with its neighbors and the international community," McClellan said. Asked why Washington insisted on multilateral talks with the DPRK, he noted that "the bilateral approach did not work. The DPRK did not abide by its commitment." And he added that the DPRK's neighbors "realize the importance of a non-nuclear peninsula. "That's important to the whole region, and if we have to advance forward on the substance of talks, then those parties need to be included."

3. Bolten on US 'Tough' DPRK Policy

Agence France-Presse ("US ENVOY BOLTON SAYS TOUGH POLICY ON NORTH KOREA HAS 'PAID OFF,'" Tokyo, 08/01/03) reported that top US arms negotiator John Bolton said a tough policy toward the DPRK had "paid off" as the DPRK said it had proposed six-way talks to end the nuclear crisis. Just a day after blasting DPRK leader Kim Jong-Il for forcing his people to live a "hellish nightmare" in Seoul, Bolton told reporters in Japan on Friday that his tough speech was part of a coordinated US strategy toward Pyongyang. "Believe me, the speech that I gave was fully cleared," Bolton told a news conference at the US embassy, dismissing suggestions that his fiery attack on Kim represented an uncoordinated diplomatic faux pas by Washington. "The important consequence here is that we have received such encouraging news about the prospects for multilateral discussions," he said. In his scathing attack in a speech to a think-tank in Seoul, Bolton said Kim was "dead wrong" in believing nuclear weapons would help the DPRK's security, insisting "indeed the opposite is true". He was speaking after Russia and the ROK said the DPRK had agreed to a US proposal for six-nation

talks, made through the PRC. "The resolve that the (US, ROK and Japanese) governments showed, all three of them, in telling the North Koreans through China ... that there wouldn't be substantive negotiations unless South Korea and Japan were in the room and at the table has paid off," he said.

4. ROK Confirms DPRK Multilateral Talks Agreement

Agence France-Presse ("SOUTH KOREA CONFIRMS NORTH KOREA ACCORD ON SIX-WAY TALKS," 08/01/03) reported that the ROK confirmed that DPRK has accepted six-way talks on the nuclear crisis. "North Korea told South Korea last night directly of its intention to accept six-way talks," Foreign Ministry spokesman Kim Sun-Heung said. He said the DPRK informed the ROK, Japan, the PRC, the US and Russia at the same time of its intention to accept the talks proposed by the US. First public word of the agreement came from the Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow which issued a statement on the DPRK's decision late Thursday. Officials here said there was no word of when the talks would take place though a senior US official speaking in Washington said they could take place as early as next month.

5. DPRK on US-ROK War Drill

Agence France-Presse ("PYONGYANG DENOUNCES US-SOUTH KOREA WAR DRILL," 08/01/03) reported that the DPRK has demanded that massive US-ROK military exercises scheduled for this month be scrapped, warning Seoul that staging the war games could jeopardise inter-Korean relations, the ROK's Unification Ministry said. Kim Ryong-Song, DPRK chief negotiator to ministerial talks with South Korea, sent a message to his southern counterpart, Unification Minister Jeong Se-Hyun, Thursday demanding that joint "Ulchi Focus Lens" drills be called off. Kim expressed regret over what he described as Seoul's bid "to stage nuclear war exercises against the fellow countrymen in league with outsiders to bring dark clouds of a nuclear war" to the Korean peninsula, the Unification Ministry said in a statement. "Now that your side is planning to stage war exercises against the North together with the US, we feel deep apprehension as to whether the itineraries of inter-Korean relations agreed upon by both sides would be implemented properly," Kim said in the message released here Friday. North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) spoke more bluntly in a dispatch late Thursday. "We consider it necessary for your side to.... make a responsible decision to immediately cancel the projected Ulji Focus Lens and reinforcement and deployment of the US forces, which would aggravate the situation and drive it to the brink of war," it said.

6. PRC on US Missile Report

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA LASHES OUT AT PENTAGON MISSILE CLAIMS ON TAIWAN," 08/01/03) reported that the PRC lashed out at a Pentagon claim it was building a missile capability across from Taiwan that would enable it to launch a surprise attack, but reiterated that the island must be reunified. "Safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of our territory is every country's undoubted right," the foreign ministry told AFP, and said the Pentagon comments were a ruse to justify the US selling advanced weapons to Taiwan. "The concerned parties in the US spread (rumours of) so-called mainland missile threats to Taiwan in various forms over and over," the ministry said. "The purpose is to make excuses, and create public opinion for (the US) selling advanced weapons to Taiwan. "China expresses strong discontent and firm opposition." The US remains the leading arms supplier to Taiwan despite shifting its political recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979. Earlier this month, reports said the US had agreed to ship AIM-120 medium-range air-to-air missiles to the Taiwanese air force to ensure military balance in the Taiwan Strait. The

Pentagon's annual report to Congress on PRC military power, released Wednesday, said the PRC is adding annually 75 short-range missiles across from Taiwan and is acquiring or developing weapons and tactics aimed at countering technologically superior US forces. "The PLA's (Peoples Liberation Army's) offensive capabilities improve as each year passes, providing Beijing, in the absence of an effective response by Taiwan, with an increasing number of credible military options to intimidate or actually attack Taiwan," said the report. Beijing Friday reiterated its stance that Taiwan is part of the PRC that must be reunified, and said any attempt to separate the territory from the "motherland" was "doomed to failure."

7. Japan DPRK Asylum Seekers

Agence France-Presse ("SUSPECTED DPRK ASYLUM-SEEKERS INTERVIEWED AT JAPANESE EMBASSY," 08/01/03) reported that ten suspected DPRK asylum-seekers taking refuge at the Japanese embassy in Bangkok were being interviewed by a Korean-speaking Japanese official, the embassy said. The ten, including two children, slipped into the embassy on Thursday when the gates were opened for a car to enter, shouting what staff said sounded like "North Korea." Embassy counsellor Akihiko Fujii told AFP that a Japanese official dispatched from Seoul arrived in Bangkok Thursday night and began interviewing the group this morning. "They (the ten) are still at the embassy. They're all okay, they're well. They slept well and ate breakfast, with no problems so far, and we've started interviewing this morning at 8:00 am (0100 GMT)," he said. He said officials were still unable to confirm whether the group were DPRKs seeking asylum. Japan's top spokesman, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda, said Thursday in Tokyo that if they were DPRK asylum seekers, they might be better off in the ROK than Japan. "Even if they came to Japan, the question is whether they could live (comfortably) here or not," he said at a news conference, adding they would probably be more at home in the ROK. The ROK said Thursday it would allow the ten in if they proved to be DPRK defectors.

8. PRC Post-SARS Development

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA TO SPEND $460 MILLION UPDATING MEDICAL EQUIPMENT POST SARS," Beijing, 08/01/03) reported that the PRC said it will spend 460 million dollars to patch up its flawed public healthcare system over the next two years, after its holes were vividly exposed during the recent SARS crisis. Most of the money will go towards buying medical equipment, Zhao Zilin, the PRC's health ministry official in charge of financing told a news briefing, the Xinhua news agency reported Friday. One hundred million dollars will be spent this year and a further 361 million next year, Zhao said. Of this year's outlay, 35 million is earmarked for the country's national network for disease control, which played a pivotal role in tackling Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which killed 349 people and infected more than 5,000. At the height of the epidemic, Beijing's hospitals in particular struggled to cope, severely eroding public faith in the health system. Beijing admitted many SARS infections occurred due to insufficient preparedness in hospitals. In a tacit admission that the capital's medical facilities were not up to the task of dealing with SARS, a completely new 1,000-bed hospital was built on the city's outskirts in barely a week. It also emerged that that only about four percent of Beijing's 66,000 doctors and nurses had any training in treating respiratory diseases. Even President Hu Jintao was forced last week to acknowledge "the backwardness of public health facilities and flaws in the public health system". Premier Wen Jiabao said that over the next three years the PRC would establish a disease control system and a mechanism to handle public emergencies. Zhao said the country would also purchase 1,060 new emergency vehicles, advanced medical equipment for Beijing hospitals and millions of dollars worth of hepatitis B vaccine. The ministry will also overhaul its purchasing of parts for medical equipment.

II. Japan

1. Japan Iraq Troop Deployment

The Japan Times (Junko Takahashi and Nao Shimoyachi, "TIME, PLACE OF DISPATCH STILL HAZY," 07/27/03) reported that despite Diet approval of a bill to allow the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel to Iraq, the Japanese government continued to wrestle with exactly when and where the SDF should be sent. "It is possible that Japan may not send the SDF to Iraq at all, depending on the security situation," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said during the final debate on the bill at the Upper House Foreign and Defense Affairs Committee on July 25. When asked by Naoto Kan, leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, to name at least one noncombat area that would be safe enough for SDF personnel, Koizumi admitted that he had no idea. Ruling party lawmakers are also inclined to delay the dispatch until after the next general election of the Lower House -- widely expected to be held in November -- because they could lose votes if SDF personnel are hurt or killed while in Iraq, government sources said. Defense Agency chief Shigeru Ishiba said the timing of the dispatch will be decided only after security conditions become predictable and SDF personnel have been fully trained to handle dangerous situations. "It would be against the law to send the SDF before those conditions are met," Ishiba said last week. "It is not appropriate to say at this point when exactly (the SDF should be sent), either October or November." A senior Defense Agency official also said the security situation is too bad to even consider any concrete plan. The government has told the US that it might take a while before any SDF units are dispatched.

Kyodo (Muhieddin Rashad, "IRAQIS WARN JAPAN'S TROOPS COULD BECOME TARGETS," Baghdad, 07/27/03) reported that as Japan prepares to send noncombat military personnel to Iraq to help rebuild a war-torn country gripped by creeping insurgency, some Iraqis have warned the Japanese troops could become targets of attacks by insurgents. "It is risky for the Japanese troops to be stationed here," Hassan al-Najjar, assistant dean of the Media College in Baghdad University, told Kyodo News in an interview. Al-Najjar said resistance groups loyal to deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein have vowed to fight any foreign troops in the country. Anmar Waheed, a post-graduate student at Media College, shares al-Najjar's concerns. "The United States is trying to internationalize the issue to have a pretext for staying in Iraq and easing the pressure on its troops here," Waheed said. "Those attacking coalition forces consider all foreign soldiers as targets," he said.

The Japan Times ("SDF TROOPS WILL 'DEFINITELY' BE DISPATCHED TO IRAQ: YAMASAKI," 07/28/03) reported that Japan will "definitely" send Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to Iraq to take part in reconstruction efforts there, Taku Yamasaki, the ruling LDP's No. 2 official, said Sunday. Yamasaki also said he is confident some areas of Iraq are combat-free, making it possible for SDF troops to operate in those places. "We won't know until we examine (the situation)," Yamasaki said when asked if it is possible to draw a line between combat and noncombat areas in Iraq. "We would like to make full preparations by sending a government mission." Defense chief Shigeru Ishiba said separately that SDF troops will initially focus on humanitarian aid rather than security and indicated that a government plan detailing the dispatch will likely come by October.

2. LDP Presidential Election

The Japan Times ("LDP PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IS SCHEDULED FOR SEPT. 20," 07/24/03) reported that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will hold its next presidential election Sept. 20, members of the ruling party's election board said. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's term as party president expires at the end of that month. Campaigning will begin Sept. 8. The 355 Diet members

from the LDP are each entitled to a full vote. Voting among other LDP members and supporters of the party nationwide -- allocated a combined 300 votes -- will take place between the start of the campaigning period and Sept. 19. Votes will be compiled by the LDP's prefectural chapters. Thus far, no LDP lawmaker has officially declared plans to challenge Koizumi, although dissatisfaction with the prime minister's economic policies remains strong within the ruling party. Former LDP policy chief Shizuka Kamei, one of Koizumi's foremost critics, has stated he is ready to run "if no other candidates emerge." The party's largest faction, led by former Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, has yet to reach a consensus on whether to field a candidate. There is speculation anti-Koizumi forces may try to field Mitsuo Horiuchi, chairman of the LDP Executive Council, or former Foreign Minister Yohei Kono. Neither of these potential candidates appears to have garnered broad support among the party ranks. Some other lawmakers, including younger-generation politicians, have also said they may enter the race if they can secure support from the minimum 20 LDP lawmakers required to file a candidacy.

3. DPJ-Liberal Party Merger

The Japan Times (Reiji Yoshida, "DPJ AND LIBERAL PARTY AGREE TO MERGE," 07/24/03) reported that in preparation for the upcoming Lower House general election, top leaders of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the Liberal Party agreed on June 23 that the two opposition parties will merge by the end of September. DPJ President Naoto Kan and his Liberal Party counterpart, Ichiro Ozawa, reached the accord during a meeting at a Tokyo hotel. According to a written memorandum between Kan and Ozawa, the Liberal Party will be disbanded and absorbed by the DPJ, which will be the surviving party. All of the policies, current executive lineup and party code of the DPJ will remain intact, which means the total dissolution of the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party, established in 1998 and led for its entire existence by Ozawa, is known for radical free-market economic policy proposals and calls for Japan to play a more active security role under the auspices of the UN. Winning the upcoming election and thereby pushing the Liberal Democratic Party-led coalition out of power is the ultimate and only factor behind the decision to dissolve the Liberal Party, Ozawa told a news conference. Ozawa indicated that he would also urge the Social Democratic Party, another opposition party, to form an alliance with DPJ-Liberal Party camp to counter the ruling coalition. The agreement between Kan and Ozawa still needs to be endorsed by their respective party organizations. But senior executives of the DPJ had already approved Kan's merger plan before he entered the talks with Ozawa. If realized, the plan would boost the number of DPJ members in the Diet from 172 to 202. But it is not yet clear how many of the 30 Diet members in the Liberal Party will follow Ozawa's top-down decision.

4. US Bases in Japan

Kyodo ("SOFA TALKS RACE AGAINST DEADLINE," Washington, 07/24/03) reported that Japan and the US will meet to try to strike a deal by the July 31 deadline on reviewing criminal procedures for US military personnel accused of crimes, officials of both countries said. The meeting will be held in Honolulu, they said. The US has been calling for improving the rights of accused military personnel by allowing a US government official to be present during interrogations by Japanese police. But Japan has insisted that suspects' human rights are fully protected under Japan's Code of Criminal Procedure. The two countries made little progress at previous two meetings earlier this month. According to a US official, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Lawless will head the US delegation.

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