

NAPSNet Daily Report 05 August, 1997

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 05 August, 1997", NAPSNet Daily Report, August 05, 1997,
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-05-august-1997/>

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I. United States

1. Four-Party Peace Talks Preliminary Meeting

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first proposed by the US and the ROK last year. "This is real progress. We have moved from a round table to a square table," Kartman told the delegations in a reference to the presence of the PRC. US officials reportedly still harbor doubts about the DPRK's real commitment to reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula, but insist that negotiations can still yield positive results. The US plans to propose new ways to ease tensions between the two Koreas, including such confidence building measures as exchanging military visits and providing advance notification of military maneuvers.

The Associated Press ("N. KOREA VOWS TO HONOR 1953 TRUCE," New York, 8/5/97) reported that later on Tuesday officials from the DPRK, the ROK, the US, and the PRC, completed the first day of the four-party Korean peace talks preliminary meeting, agreeing to reconvene at 10:00 a.m. Wednesday. Although none of the four delegation chiefs responded when asked about progress during Tuesday's talks, during the lunch break a beaming PRC Assistant Foreign Minister Chen Jian declared, "So far, so good," and flashed a "V" for victory sign. Sources close to the talks said the delegations agreed to set a date for a peace conference first, to be followed by discussions on the venue and then the agenda. The last item is the stickiest due to the DPRK's desire to include the issue of the withdrawal of US troops from the ROK. The DPRK's head delegate, Kim Gye-gwan, said his country wanted a "fruitful conclusion" to the talks and indicated the DPRK would be willing to discuss confidence-building measures with the ROK. In Pyongyang, the DPRK's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)

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2. DPRK Drought

The New York Times (Barbara Crossette, "RELIEF TEAMS SAY NORTH KOREA FACES VAST DROUGHT EMERGENCY," United Nations, 8/5/97, A1) carried a front-page story discussing current drought conditions in the DPRK and the drought's threat to this year's food production in the famine-stricken country. Projections now show that at least 1.5 million tons of this year's anticipated food harvest of 4 million tons will be lost, the report said. The report quoted relief officials allowed to visit the DPRK over the last several weeks as saying that the drought may be pushing millions of people to the brink of starvation and that they have not seen such severe malnutrition since the famines in Ethiopia and Somalia. The report quoted an official from the World Food Program as saying, "Flying over the northeast in a chopper from Pyongyang to Hamhung and Chongjin provides stark visual data on the extent and severity of the drought. Vast expanses of parched, arid land; fields with barely a hint of green crops; fields that were planted in the past lying barren and deserted; much of the hillside and mountainside stripped of trees, exposing sandy soil, rocky outcrops, and scrub vegetation. The sense I got was one of exhaustion -- parched, dried, exhausted land." However, the report also noted that relief officials say they cannot move freely in the DPRK and that their visits were tightly controlled by communist authorities, making the extent of the situation hard to gauge. They noted that DPRK officials themselves often appear ambivalent about how dire a picture they want to paint for the outside world. The report quoted an unnamed senior US official in Washington as acknowledging that the US does not yet have a full grasp of the extent of the food shortages, but as also saying, "What we do know is that there is serious malnutrition across the country. I have no doubt that there are people on the verge of starvation, no doubt at all."

3. DPRK Grain Purchase Still Off

Reuters ("CARGILL SAYS HAS NO NEW FOOD DEAL WITH NORTH KOREA," Chicago, 8/5/97) reported that US grain conglomerate Cargill Inc. spokeswoman Linda Thrane said on Tuesday that the company has reached no new deals to send wheat or rice to the DPRK after a barter deal fell through in June. "Nothing has changed," Thrane said. "We still have the license for a commercial sale of wheat or rice. There's nothing to report." Cargill received permission early this year to sell up to 500,000 metric tons of food grains to the DPRK, and reached a barter deal in April to exchange 20,000 tons of wheat for 5,000 tons of zinc. The deal fell apart in early June, just before delivery. Cargill chairman Ernie Micek told reporters last week that the potential for future barter deals, perhaps with other metals, would be limited because the DPRK had few commodities available for barter and was not in a position to deliver large quantities.

4. US-Japan Military Relations

The Associated Press ("JAPAN TO CUT FUNDS TO US FORCES," Tokyo, 8/5/97) reported that Japan's Asahi newspaper reported Tuesday that Japan likely will cut its contribution to maintaining US armed forces in the country starting next year. The reduction would be the first since 1978, when Japan started paying part of the operating costs for US military bases in Japan. This year Japan will pay US\$2.3 billion toward the costs. Japan and the US negotiate their shares of the costs every three years, with the next round of bargaining scheduled for 1998. Commenting on the report, a spokeswoman for the Japanese Foreign Ministry said the Defense Agency was considering a reduction of Japan's share but that no formal decision had yet been made. US officials were not available for comment.

II. Republic of Korea

1. Four-Party Peace Talks Preliminary Meeting

With preliminary four-party peace talks opening in New York today, the ROK, the PRC, and the US yesterday shared the belief that the minister-level four-party meeting to discuss a lasting peace agreement on the Korean peninsula should be held as soon as possible, ROK officials said. ROK delegates held bilateral meetings with their US and PRC counterparts separately to exchange opinions in preparation for the preliminary meeting to be headed by assistant minister-level officials from the four countries. "Seoul hopes in principle that the four-party talks should be convened in the capitals of the four countries alternately, starting from the Korean peninsula," a ROK Foreign Ministry official said. However, another official said that there are some political and technical problems in choosing the venue inside the Korean peninsula because, among other things, it is virtually impossible to make phone communications from Seoul to Pyongyang and vice versa. Therefore, the options of a third city like Geneva or Singapore are still alive because Seoul has taken a flexible posture on the issue, the official added. Officials here do not expect an early breakthrough in the realization of four-party talks because it is still unpredictable how the DPRK will act in the preliminary meeting. The DPRK is expected to call on the participants to make numerical pledges on the size of additional grain assistance, a demand which is not acceptable to the ROK and the US. "In case the DPRK sticks to the demand, it would be hard for the four countries to agree on procedural matters on the four-party talks," the official said. The DPRK delegation also is expected to call for lifting of US-imposed economic sanctions, improvement of US-DPRK relations, and withdrawal of US forces stationed in the ROK. "Although we are willing to discuss the issue of American troops, we don't believe that it should be one of the agenda items," the official said. Although Seoul wants to hold only one round of preliminary meetings and reach an agreement on the realization of four-party talks, it is highly likely that the four countries will meet several more times to come to an agreement. (Korea Times, Son Key-young, "SEOUL, BEIJING, WASHINGTON AGREE ON EARLY REALIZATION OF 4-PARTY TALKS," 08/05/97)

2. ROK AWACS Procurement

According to a US government official, the US is expected to drastically lower the price of the E-767 Airborne Warning & Control Systems (AWACS) in an offer to be made to the ROK in September, and it has verbally notified ROK procurement officials of the new offer. When asked to confirm the new offer, Lee Chong-nam, ROK Assistant Defense Minister for Acquisition and Technology, said that it is true that the ministry made an inquiry about the price of the US-made AWACS, but he was not notified about the new prices. Three products are on the ROK's short list, and the new US offer will likely strengthen its position against Israel and Sweden in the fierce competition to win the lucrative US\$1.6 billion ROK deal. Although the US product is arguably the most powerful among the three, its stiff price tag is putting a damper on the ROK's enthusiasm for the E-767. Israel's Phalcons and Sweden's Erieye are priced at US\$300 million and US\$80 million per unit, and some Korean procurement officials are strongly supporting either of them over the US system. The US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that the US government is preparing to offer four E-767 AWACS at a price close to US\$1.9 billion, a considerably lower price than the original US\$2.8 billion the US quoted the ROK government in 1995. Asked to explain the difference between the 1995 price and the new offer, the official said that the previous estimate included non-recurring costs from research and development and was a very rough figure coming from "every option thrown together." "We have taken away the R&D costs in order to sweeten our offer," he said. Finally, if past arms deals with the US serve as any indication, the ROK might be able to acquire the US-made AWACS at an even lower price than the LOA offer. (Korea Times, Oh Young-jin, "US Expected to Lower Price of AWACS," 08/05/97)

3. Inter-Korean Phone Line for KEDO Project

The first direct phone link between the two Koreas opened yesterday. The eight telephone lines

connect the Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO) in the ROK with the Kumho area of the DPRK, the site of the nuclear reactors to be provided by the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). KEPCO President Rieh Chong-hun and Park Young-chol, DPRK chief of the Sinpo site, were the first to use the line during an inaugural phone call. Linked by the INTELSAT satellite from the DPRK to Japan and then by fiber-optic cables to Seoul via Pusan, the eight lines constitute the total telecommunications links between the two Koreas. (Korea Herald, "INTER-KOREAN PHONE LINES CONNECT REACTOR SITE TO KEPCO," 08/05/97)

4. ROK-Japan Territorial Waters Dispute

Legislators plan to discuss laws aimed at preserving the ecosystem on and around the disputed Tokto islets during September's regular National Assembly session. A dozen ruling and opposition lawmakers, including those who once served as environment ministers, have recently submitted bills to the National Assembly. The legislation would also help the nation assert its sovereignty over Tokto, said Representative Kim Zoong-wie, chief policymaker of the ruling New Korea Party. Under the bills, the environment minister would be obligated to work out a new plan to help preserve the islands' ecosystem, and there would be a ban on the construction of housing, reclamation, and logging on remote islands groups, including Tokto. Tokto, lying in the East Sea between the ROK and Japan, has long been the subject of rival sovereignty claims by the two countries. In a bid to lodge claims to Tokto, both countries have declared their own 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zones (EEZ) according to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, causing an overlap of their territorial waters. As part of their efforts to solve the territorial dispute, Seoul and Tokyo have held a series of negotiations on revision of the ROK-Japan fishery treaty. The fishing treaty, the basic law governing fishing operations in the waters between them, requires both countries to reach an agreement before drawing up a new boundary between their territorial waters. The talks, however, have recently hit trouble as Japan unilaterally used a straight baseline to expand its territorial sea boundary which the ROK refuses to accept. Japan has since seized ROK fishing boats crossing into its new territorial seas. In protest against the seizures, the ROK National Assembly adopted a resolution late last month, demanding Japan's apology and a promise to ensure the incidents do not recur. Lawmakers on the National Assembly's Agriculture, Maritime and Fisheries Committee also plan to make a protest visit to Japan later this month. (Korea Herald, Nam In-soo, "PLANNED LAWS ASSERT SOVEREIGNTY OVER TOKTO," 08/05/97)

5. ROK Appeals to the UNHCR

The ROK government recently sent a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) asking for its cooperation in repatriating a ROK pastor who was kidnapped during his stay in the PRC and taken to the DPRK. The letter was sent to the UNHCR late last month by Sun Joun-yung, ROK ambassador to the UN in Geneva, said a ROK Foreign Ministry official yesterday. The move followed the PRC government's deportation of a DPRK agent involved in the abduction at the end of his two-year jail term on July 28. When notified of the PRC's decision to return Li Kyong-chun to the DPRK, a ROK Foreign Ministry spokesman expressed regret, saying the decision taken was despite the fact that the pastor, Ahn Seung-un, has not been released. In a meeting with his PRC counterpart Qian Qichen in Kuala Lumpur last month, ROK Foreign Minister Yoo Chong-ha asked Beijing to take steps to return Ahn to the ROK. The pastor was last seen in July 1995, in the northeastern PRC city of Yanji, where he was involved in missionary activities, before he was abducted by Li and three DPRK accomplices. A PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman, however, later declared Ahn's case closed, noting that Beijing has done what was needed to resolve the matter. Last year, a PRC court sentenced Li, the DPRK agent who was arrested by PRC security authorities after the kidnapping of Ahn, to a two-year prison term for illegal detainment and illegal exit. Ahn appeared on DPRK television about a month after his abduction claiming that he defected

voluntarily. However, according to an ethnic Korean in the US, he has been quoted as saying that he wants to return to the ROK. (Korea Herald, "SEOUL SEEKS UNHCR HELP IN AHN CASE," 098/04/97)

6. ROK-Malaysian Relations

Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi was set to arrive in Seoul Monday for a two-day visit, during which he is to meet with ROK Foreign Minister Yoo Chong-ha and President Kim Young-sam. During a courtesy call on President Kim, Abdullah is expected to deliver a letter from Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad inviting him to attend summit talks of the Association of Asian Nations (ASEAN) scheduled for December 15-16 in Kuala Lumpur. During their talks today, the ROK and Malaysian foreign ministers will discuss follow-up steps to agreements reached during President Kim's visit to Malaysia last November, the situations on the Korean Peninsula and in the Southeast Asian region, and ASEAN's contribution to the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) project to build two light-water nuclear reactors in the DPRK. Minister Abdullah is also expected to call on the ROK to import more goods and make more investments in Malaysia. According to figures from the ROK Ministry, the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries amounted to US\$7.3 billion last year, with the ROK recording a surplus of US\$1.3 billion. (Korea Herald, "MALAYSIAN MINISTER STAY HERE FOR 3-DAY VISIT," 8/04/97)

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Produced by [the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development](#).

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