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I. United States

1. US-DPRK Engagement

US State Department Spokesman James Foley ("STATE DEPARTMENT NOON BRIEFING," USIA Transcript, 9/5/97) confirmed that US and DPRK officials met Thursday in New York, "at the level of the North Korea office director, Mark Minton." Foley said further such meetings were possible but nothing specifically was scheduled. Asked if the DPRK representatives said whether they still intended to attend the upcoming four-party talks preliminary meeting, Foley replied, "They didn't say that they were; they didn't say that they were not. There's been no change in their position. I have nothing new to report on that. Our offered assumption remains that they will come." Foley had no further comment on Thursday's meeting, or on the prospect for resumption of US-DPRK missile proliferation talks.

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4. ROK Presidential Race

The AP-Dow Jones News Service ("S. KOREA PRESIDENT KIM TO GIVE UP HELM OF RULING PARTY," Seoul, 9/8/97) reported that ROK President Kim Young-sam said Monday that later this month he will hand over the helm of his ruling New Korea Party to its presidential candidate, Lee Hoi-chang, to help him pull together a party now badly divided with the national elections due in December. Lee, 62, was elected as the party's presidential candidate in July, but his popularity has since plummeted amid opposition claims that his two sons intentionally lost weight to be exempted from the ROK's mandatory 28-month military service, and now some party legislators are demanding that he be replaced. "All party members must rally around Mr. Lee Hoi-chang to help him win the election" in December, Kim was quoted as telling senior party officials during a dinner at the presidential Blue House.

The New York Times (Nicholas D. Kristof, "SONS' MILITARY WEIGH-IN SLOWS KOREAN CANDIDATE," Seoul, 9/7/97) reported that the precipitous fall in the popularity of the ROK ruling party's presidential candidate, Lee Hoi-chang, reflects genuine public outrage at his sons' success in avoiding mandatory military service through equally precipitous drops in each son's weight. Both sons lost 22 pounds (ten kilograms) between their initial physical examinations and the time they reported for duty and were then granted exemptions, raising suspicions that the weight loss was deliberate. The report noted that the percentage of National Assembly members, lawmakers' sons, and leading industrialists' sons who have escaped military service greatly exceeds that of the general public. The report observed that due to the country's deep Confucian values, Lee is held responsible for the actions of his sons, but it also noted that media freedom to discuss the issue indicates the extent to which democratic processes have taken hold.

The Associated Press (Reid G. Miller, "SKOREA PRESIDENT LOSING POPULARITY," Seoul, 9/7/97) reported that the fall in popularity of Lee Hoi-chang as a result of suspicions his sons conspired to avoid military service has some pundits cautiously predicting that in December's election an

opposition candidate might win ROK's presidency for the first time. Lee, a former prime minister and Supreme Court justice, won the nomination largely on the strength of his reputation for honesty and the hope that he could put a new luster on the ruling party's tarnished image after years of corruption scandals, some of which reached into President Kim Young-sam's own office. Instead, for the first time in Korean political history an opposition candidate has taken the lead in public polls for an extended period so close to an election. Lee's slippage is so steep he is now behind even Seoul's mayor, who is running as a minor opposition candidate. "The prevailing public opinion is that candidate Lee will find it difficult to get out of the trouble," the independent national newspaper, Moonhwa Ilbo, said in an analysis. "It's too early to predict an opposition victory but there are important signs pointing to that possibility," said Paik Sung-ki, a political science professor at Kyongwon University. Lee also is handicapped by not having access to the almost unlimited funds that the government lavished on previous ruling party candidates, due to opposition party victories in important mayoral and gubernatorial posts around the country two years ago, which sharply curbed the number of patronage jobs the ruling party could hand out in exchange for support.

5. Japan-PRC Relations

The Associated Press ("HASHIMOTO WRAPS UP VISIT TO CHINA," Beijing, 9/8/97) reported that on Sunday Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto ended a four-day trip to the PRC with a visit to Shenyang, where he became the first postwar Japanese leader to set foot in the city where Japan began its invasion of China in 1931, and to a Japanese investment center in Dalian, a symbolically important stop in a region of the country brutalized by the Japanese military during its occupation. The official PRC news agency Xinhua reported that during his visit, which began in Beijing on Thursday, Hashimoto invited PRC President Jiang Zemin to visit Japan next year, and the two sides narrowed their differences on terms for the PRC's entry to the World Trade Organization and agreed to cooperate on environmental issues. However, Hashimoto had mixed success in his attempt to reassure PRC leaders about revisions in the US-Japanese military alliance that the PRC contends is meant to isolate it. Beijing has been especially uneasy since a member of Hashimoto's Cabinet said last month that the alliance might require Tokyo to support US forces in a conflict between the PRC and Taiwan. Hashimoto maintained that the alliance is purely defensive, and that Tokyo respects Beijing's claim to sovereignty over Taiwan. Hashimoto also offered PRC leaders an apology for suffering caused by Japanese troops during the war, but did not go beyond the wording first used by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995. PRC officials expressed appreciation for his remarks, but said Japan had to prove its sincerity to the Chinese people. "Correctly understanding and treating history is an important premise for our two countries as we face the future," PRC state-run media quoted Jiang as saying.

The AP-Dow Jones News Service ("S. KOREA CRITICIZES CHINA-JAPAN FISHERIES PACT, SEEKS TALKS," Seoul, 9/8/97) reported that the ROK Foreign Ministry on Monday protested a new agreement between Japan and the PRC tentatively reached last week to place a disputed body of water in the East China Sea under their joint control, and demanded three-way talks to resolve the matter. The ROK asserted that the disputed area in the East China Sea overlaps the exclusive economic zone that the ROK claims around its shores, and so the agreement violates its fishing rights. The agreement established temporary fishing rules in the disputed area while Beijing and Tokyo are locked in territorial disputes over creating their own 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zones, authorized under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

II. Republic of Korea

1. Four-Party Talks Status

ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Song Young-shik and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Charles

Kartman were due to hold talks in Seoul Monday to discuss the DPRK's possible boycott of the pending preliminary meeting for the proposed four-party Korean peace talks slated for mid-September, ROK Foreign Ministry officials said. The DPRK has given out ambiguous signals about its attendance of the talks following the defection of two of its senior diplomats to the US. In their September 4 working-level negotiations with US officials in New York, DPRK officials demanded immediate repatriation of defected DPRK diplomats Chang Sung-kil and his brother, Chang Sung-ho, the officials said. The DPRK immediately pulled out of planned August 28 missile talks with the US following the defections. ROK officials said Song and Kartman will also fine tune their position on the DPRK's demands that withdrawal of the 37 thousand US troops stationed in the ROK and a separate peace treaty with the US should be discussed at the four-party talks. The first attempt to set a date and agenda for the four-party talks, aimed at establishing a lasting peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, broke down early August, mainly over these sensitive issues. Today's US-ROK meeting precedes the next working-level talks between Washington and Pyongyang slated for sometime this week in New York. (Korea Herald, "SEOUL, WASHINGTON TO HOLD HIGH-LEVEL TALKS ON DPRK," 09/08/97)

2. DMZ Activities

Following an armed clash in July, the DPRK has begun to give advance notice of reconnaissance activities within the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said yesterday. In reference to the DPRK military's unprecedented change of attitude, a JCS spokesman said, "It seems that the clash was a good lesson for the North Koreans." The spokesman noted that previously, groups of armed DPRK soldiers violated the Military Demarcation Line (MDL), which runs along the center of the four-km-wide buffer zone, without any prior notice, and usually returned to the DPRK side after loudspeaker warnings from ROK guards. An armed clash broke out July 16 when a group of DPRK soldiers ignored loudspeaker warnings and intruded some 70 meters south of the MDL in Chorwon, Kangwon Province. ROK soldiers fired warning shots into the air, and two DPRK guard posts several hundred meters away responded by firing machine guns, mortars and anti-tank guns. In a brief gun fight, a few DPRK soldiers were reportedly wounded, while no ROK casualties were reported. "Since then they notify us in advance that a certain number of their soldiers will go out for routine reconnaissance at a certain time and certain location in the DMZ," the JCS spokesman said. (Korea Herald, "DPRK GIVES PRIOR NOTICE FOR DMZ RECONNAISSANCE," 09/08/97)

3. Private US Aid to the DPRK

The US humanitarian organization AmeriCares said Thursday it will ship US\$20 million worth of medicine and medical supplies to the DPRK beginning next week. AmeriCares said the Pyongyang government has agreed to let it monitor distribution and ensure that supplies reach only civilians. The flight carrying the supplies from New York next week will be the first US civilian flight to land in the DPRK. Along with the supplies, AmeriCares is sending three to five volunteer physicians and nurses. AmeriCares will distribute 45 tons of medicine and equipment, including infant formula, antibiotics, aspirin, stethoscopes, vitamins, latex gloves and nutritional supplements through DPRK hospitals, orphanages and health clinics. "People are dying and many more are going to die if the world doesn't come to the aid," said Robert Macauley, founder of the relief agency that has distributed more than 1.7 billion tons of supplies to nations in crisis since 1982. Li Gun, DPRK's ambassador to the UN, accepted the AmeriCares offer in a letter on Wednesday. In total, the DPRK has accepted about US\$316 million in aid via UN agencies, the Red Cross, private charities and foreign governments. (Korea Herald, "FIRST US CIVILIAN FLIGHT TO NK NEXT WEEK," 09/06/97) [Ed. note: See "Private US Aid to DPRK" in the US section of the September 4 Daily Report.]

4. Japan-PRC Relations

Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto on Friday offered reassurances to his PRC counterpart, Vice Premier Li Peng, in an attempt to soothe the PRC's suspicions of the Japan-US security alliance. Meanwhile, authorities in Japan stopped an opposition lawmaker from spoiling Hashimoto's effort by sailing to a tiny atoll claimed by both countries. A trip in May to the Japanese-controlled islands by the legislator, Shingo Nishimura, set off an uproar in the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Although uninhabited, the islands, about 190 kilometers (120 miles) Northeast of Taiwan, are believed to provide rich fishing grounds and possible oil and gas deposits. On Friday the Japanese coast guard stopped the boat carrying Nishimura and 14 supporters and forced it to return to its port of origin in Okinawa, the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency said. Hashimoto faces strong pressure from the more nationalist wing of his conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to stand up to the PRC, but he also needs to soothe tensions with the PRC, a major trading partner and close neighbor. (Korea Herald, "JAPANESE LEADER REASSURES PRC ON TIES WITH US," 09/06/97)

5. Japan-DPRK Relations

The Japanese daily "Nihon Kasei" reported Saturday that the first group of Japanese wives of North Koreans to visit their homeland will number between 30 to 50. The paper said that at working level discussions in Beijing by the countries' respective Red Cross agencies, DPRK representatives proposed the size of the party and Japanese representatives readily accepted. Problems are expected in finalizing the names of candidates as it is expected that the DPRK will try to send an 'elite' group of wives rather than those from the general public. (Chosun Ilbo, "JAPAN AND NK DISCUSS WIVES HOMECOMING," 09/07/97)

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