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CONTENTS

I. United States

1. DPRK-US Relations
2. PRC-Pakistan Nuclear Plant
3. Japan War Time Cooperation Bill
4. ROK Russian Tank DMZ Deployment
5. ROK Presidential Impeachment Motion
6. PRC-Taiwan Relations
7. PRC-Dalai Lama Relations

I. United States

1. DPRK-US Relations

The Associated Press (Hans Greimel, "NORTH KOREA REJECTS KEY US DEMAND," Seoul, 03/09/04) reported that the DPRK rejected a key US demand Tuesday for easing nuclear tensions and threatened to link the withdrawal of US troops from the ROK to a settlement, as the DPRK tried to bolster its hand ahead of talks on the dispute. The DPRK dismissed as "unrealistic" the stance by Washington that the DPRK verifiably and irreversibly dismantle its atomic weapons programs as a first step in resolving the 17-month standoff, according to the official KCNA news agency. US insistence that the DPRK "completely, verifiably and irreversibly" begin dismantling its nuclear programs before receiving concessions was a key sticking point in last month's six-nation talks aimed at brokering a deal. The DPRK also reiterated that it may pin the withdrawal of US troops from the ROK to the nuclear talks and demand a "verifiable and irreversible" security guarantee from the US. "Now that the US persistently forces a complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of nuclear program upon the DPRK, the latter cannot but demand the former guarantee a complete, verifiable and irreversible security, the core of which is the total withdrawal of the US troops from South Korea," the KCNA report said.

2. PRC-Pakistan Nuclear Plant

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA ON VERGE OF PACT TO BUILD NUCLEAR PLANT IN PAKISTAN," 03/09/04) reported that the PRC is on the verge of agreeing with Pakistan to build a second nuclear plant for civilian use. The 300 megawatt nuclear power plant at Chashma, in the central Pakistani province of Punjab, will be built next to the first PRC supplied plant, which became operational in 1999. The Financial Times quoted Pakistani officials as saying the deal was now "in the final stages" with technicalities being hammered out at secret talks in Beijing last week. The paper said a price now had to be settled, ending several months of Sino-Pakistani negotiations following discussions on the subject between President Pervez Musharraf and PRC leader Hu Jintao in Beijing in November. The China National Nuclear Cooperation (CNNC) confirmed the talks had taken place but refused to reveal the outcome.

3. Japan War Time Cooperation Bill

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN APPROVES BILLS TO AUTHORISE WARTIME COOPERATION WITH US," 03/09/04) reported that Japan's cabinet approved a set of bills, including measures to authorize US-Japanese military cooperation in case of an attack on the country, a government official said. The government will shortly submit the seven bills to parliament, in order to be enacted into law before the current session ends on June 16, the official said. The bills are part of Japan's efforts to acquire its first legal framework for responding to military attack since World War II. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi ordered his ministers to ensure smooth passage of the bills. "Considering the importance and emergence of the bills, I think we need to pass the bills as soon as possible," Koizumi was quoted by Jiji Press as saying at a cabinet meeting. "I would like ministers concerned to cooperate in upcoming procedures for the passage in the Diet," he said.

4. ROK Russian Tank DMZ Deployment

Agence France-Presse ("SOUTH KOREA TO DEPLOY RUSSIAN TANKS ALONG INTER-KOREAN BORDER," 03/09/04) reported that the ROK will deploy a battalion of Russian tanks and armored vehicles for the first time along the border with the DPRK, military officials said. The deployment of T-80 U tanks and BMP-3 combat vehicles will bolster the ROK's capability to deter any aggression by the DPRK, which relies on Russian-built weapons for its ground forces, the defense ministry said. "This will be the first deployment of Russian weapons in front-line areas," a ministry official told AFP. The DPRK deploys more than 6,000 tanks and armored vehicles along the heavily armed border with the ROK. T-62 tanks and BMP series vehicles are the mainstream of DPRK ground forces, while the ROK is heavily dependent on US-designed equipment. The ROK began purchasing Russian weapons in 1996 in repayment in kind to offset part of a loan to the former Soviet Union. As of June last year, Russia has paid back 460 million in its debt service to the ROK in the form of military equipment and raw materials including uranium.

5. ROK Presidential Impeachment Motion

Agence France-Presse ("SKOREAN OPPOSITION PUSHES THROUGH IMPEACHMENT MOTION AGAINST PRESIDENT," 03/09/04) reported that political turmoil deepened as opposition lawmakers approved a motion to impeach a ROK president for the first time in history in a bid to topple reformist leader Roh Moo-Hyun. A total of 159 oppositon legislators endorsed the motion to open an impeachment debate citing Roh's violation of election law, well above the majority of the 270-member National Assembly required to introduce the bill. "We have received the motion, signed by

159 opposition lawmakers," a National Assembly spokesman told AFP. The figure included 108 members from the main opposition Grand National Party (GNP) and 51 from the smaller opposition Millennium Democratic Party (MDP), he said. However, analysts pointed out that the vote fell short of the two-thirds majority, or 181 votes, required to approve impeachment following debate later this week in parliament, indicating that the impeachment drive would ultimately fail. The impeachment debate is set to begin within 24 hours and a vote will be scheduled within the following 72 hours, according to National Assembly officials. GNP floor leader Hong Sa-Deok said the opposition would seek a vote on Thursday.

6. PRC-Taiwan Relations

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN PRESIDENT ACCUSES CHINA OF INTERFERING IN ELECTION," 03/09/04) reported that Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian accused China of trying to sabotage his campaign for re-election on March 20 by criticizing his leadership through third countries. Chen said it was clear that the PRC hoped he would fail to secure a second four-year term and accused its leadership of "delicate" diplomacy to secure their goal. Chen, of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is running neck and neck with his rival from the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), Lien Chan, who has a more conciliatory policy towards the mainland. "It is clear to everybody that China does not want me to get re-elected," Chen told the Taiwan's TVBS television network in an interview. "But it is the Taiwanese people who are electing their president and it is not something for Beijing to decide." "In the past presidential elections, China had tried to intervene and the results were just the opposite of what they wanted," Chen said. "This time, they are trying again but in a more delicate manner -- through third countries. Chen did not go into details, but observers said he was referring to the rebuke and opposition from US President George W. Bush and French President Jacques Chirac to a referendum he has called to run on election day.

7. PRC-Dalai Lama Relations

Agence France-Presse ("FEW SIGNS OF CHINA RELAXING HARDLINE POLICY 45 YEARS AFTER DALAI LAMA FLED," 03/09/04) reported that forty-five years after the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in fear of his life, the PRC's communist leaders show little sign that he will be allowed back any time soon, fearing his return would spark separatist activism. While the PRC says they are prepared for talks, they also regularly accuse Tibet's spiritual leader of "secessionist activities" and strict conditions are attached to any unlikely homecoming. The Dalai Lama has said he is willing to do almost anything to settle the issue of Tibet, even if it means going to the PRC personally. But he has yet to publicly express willingness to recognize that Taiwan is a part of the PRC -- a key demand by Beijing, along with his renouncement of an independent Tibet. "The door for negotiations with the Dalai Lama is always open," China's foreign ministry said when asked its position by AFP. "We hope he can abandon his position of separating Taiwan from China. We hope he will admit officially that Taiwan is a part of China." Despite Beijing's fears, the Dalai Lama stresses that an independent Tibet is not on his agenda, but rather greater autonomy from the PRC's leaders. "I have reiterated like a mantra that I am not seeking independence, I am not trying to separate Tibet from China," he said late last year. "I am only seeking a genuine autonomy for Tibet, but the PRC leadership has a hard time believing what I am saying. This is why a face-to-face meeting is very important." While two rounds of talks between the Dalai Lama's camp and PRC representatives have already taken place, in September 2002 and May 2003, a third round, expected last October, never occurred.

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