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- 1. US Defense Officials Take Hard Stance on DPRK
- 2. US Senators Comment on DPRK Visit
- 3. Vietnamese Food Aid to DPRK
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I. United States

1. US Defense Officials Take Hard Stance on DPRK

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The Associated Press ("SHALIKASHVILI WARY ON NORTH KOREA," Tokyo, 4/11/97) and Reuters ("U.S. DEFENSE URGES CAUTION IN HELPING N. KOREA," Seoul, 4/11/97) reported that General John Shalikashvili, the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, said Friday that the DPRK was on a war footing despite its appeals for food to avert famine and that the US and the ROK must be careful not to let their guard down as they try to draw the DPRK into peace talks. Shalikashvili, who visited the ROK earlier this week, said that there has been no decline in the DPRK's formidable military capability despite recent positive developments. Shalikashvili said he did "not want to fuel any kind of war talk here," but cautioned that US and ROK forces must remain "very vigilant and very ready for the unexpected." Shalikashvili questioned how badly the DPRK really was hurting, saying fighter pilots had increased their flying time and the military had just completed extensive winter drills. "The North Koreans have just completed an extensive winter training cycle," he said. "If they are in such great difficulty as they claim they are, and if they are in need of assistance, why are they spending their resources on this kind of military exercising?"

2. US Senators Comment on DPRK Visit

US Senator Ted Stevens ("SEN STEVENS 4/11 ON NORTH KOREA TRIP," USIA Unofficial Transcript, 4/11/97) discussed his recent visit to the DPRK at a news conference in Washington, accompanied by the other members of the congressional delegation that he led. Stevens said the senators wanted to "to try to understand the views of the government in Pyongyang on the preliminary talks for the four-party process." "We carried with us a simple message; we want to improve relationships with North Korea based upon the four-party talks," he said. "We stated to our North Korean hosts that there is complete unanimity between the United States and the Republic of Korea on our shared objectives -- promote confidence-building measures, reduce tensions, and eliminate the possibility of a military conflict on the Korean Peninsula." Stevens added that his delegation urged the DPRK to commence the four-party talks as soon as possible, but stressed that US food aid would not be used to get North Korea to the talks. "We should participate in the international movement to supply food to North Korea to meet their problems regarding starvation, particularly of children, but not as a precondition to North Korea's coming to the table and continuing the four-party talks," Stevens said. Regarding a possible DPRK military attack on the ROK, Stevens said: "I told the North Koreans that if they attacked the South, they would be committing national suicide. I think we are prepared to meet any possible contingency there." Stevens (Republican, Alaska) was joined on the trip by Senators Thad Cochran (Republican, Mississippi), Daniel Inouye (Democrat, Hawaii), Pete Domenici (Republican, New Mexico) and Pat

Roberts (Republican, Kansas). Reinforcing Stevens' point on US resolve to defend the ROK, Senator Domenici said, "I want to make sure that everybody understands that the leaders of the United States military say that same thing openly and publicly." On the question of the DPRK's light-water reactor and its energy situation, Senator Cochran said that the delegation emphasized to the DPRK "that they have to continue to make those facilities accessible to the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors, to verify that they're not using plutonium or generating weapons-grade material that they could use to make nuclear weapons." Senator Inouye concluded, "If the world does not respond to this present crisis I think we may be in for trouble, when one considers that North Korea has the fourth-largest army in the world, and over 1,000 artillery pieces aimed at Seoul. We cannot take this lightly." [Ed. note: The full transcript of this news conference will be distributed to Daily Report recipients in a separate posting.]

3. Vietnamese Food Aid to DPRK

AP-Dow Jones News Service ("VIETNAM HASN'T DECIDED ON NORTH KOREAN REQUEST TO BUY FOOD," Hanoi, 4/11/97) reported that the Vietnamese government hasn't decided whether it will sell food to the DPRK despite a request from visiting DPRK deputy prime minister Kong Chin-tae. "North Korea has proposed to buy some more food from Vietnam. The relevant bodies of the two sides will discuss this matter concretely," a Vietnamese Foreign Ministry statement said Friday. The statement did not indicate how much food the DPRK has sought to purchase, or on what terms. During Kong's trip, official Vietnamese media have reported frequently on expressions of sympathy about the dire food situation in the DPRK, but no substantive steps have been mentioned. Last year, Vietnam is believed to have supplied about 20,000 metric tons of rice to the DPRK. Although both are avowedly communist countries, Vietnam and the DPRK have distant relationship. Vietnam has moved forward strongly with economic reforms in the last decade and opened up to the world, while the DPRK has clung to its doctrine of socialist self-reliance. Also, Vietnam has established diplomatic relations with the ROK, and two-way trade between those states reached about US$1.80 billion in 1996, while two-way trade between Vietnam and the DPRK that year is estimated at less than US$1.0 million.

4. US Defense Department Comments on Shooting Incident

US Defense Department Deputy Spokesman Mike Doubleday ("PENTAGON SPOKESMAN'S REGULAR BRIEFING," USIA Transcript, 4/11/97) commented on the gunfire on Thursday between DPRK and ROK troops at the Korean DMZ. Doubleday said the incident "involved a very few North Korean soldiers ... who were armed with rifles, who crossed over the DMZ very, very briefly. There were some shots that were fired by the soldiers from the Republic of Korea side, and the North Korean soldiers ran back over to their side. We think this is an isolated incident, and we certainly don't view it as any kind of threatening event." Doubleday described the incident as "warning shots and not exchange of gunfire ... my understanding of the events is that the shots were actually fired into the air, which is kind of standard in these situations." Doubleday added that such incidents occur "with enough regularity that we don't view them as particularly threatening."

5. US Bases in Okinawa

The Associated Press ("JAPAN LAWMAKERS BACK OKINAWA BASES," Tokyo, 4/11/97) reported that despite protests from Okinawa, Japanese lawmakers moved Friday to give the government more power to force the island's property owners lease land for US military bases. Parliament's lower house approved legislation for the expanded powers by a wide majority, sending the new law on to expected approval by the upper house as early as next week. Presently, some 3,000 landowners on Okinawa are refusing to renew leases that will expire May 14. The resistance signifies the increasing unwillingness of Okinawan residents to host the two-thirds of the 47,000 US troops in Japan that are

based on the small island. Okinawa Gov. Masahide Ota, a longtime opponent of the heavy US military presence on Okinawa, reacted angrily to the bill's passage by the lower house. "The fact that the bill was passed without a serious debate on the ill effects the bases will have on the Okinawan people is very regrettable," Ota said. Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto is eager for the bill to be passed so Japan can comply with its obligation to make land available for the U.S. military under the US-Japan security treaty. Hashimoto also wants to resolve the issue before a summit with President Clinton later this month.

II. Republic of Korea

1. US-Russia Missile Deal

Russia and the US are contenders for an estimated US$1 billion contract for a surface-to-air missile system in the ROK. Following visiting US Defense Secretary William Cohen's heightened sales promotion of the US Patriot missiles, Russian Ambassador George F. Kunadze, in a thinly-veiled counterattack, accused the US of "bullying a customer into buying the merchandise." He added that the sales should be considered on the basis of product quality and not on price. Kunadze, in a strongly-worded defense of the Russian SA-12 missile system that the ROK government is considering, said that the "SA-12 (or S-300V) ground-based air defense system is superior in range, accuracy and deployment time, which are critical to the territorial features of the Korean Peninsula." Refuting the criticism that the Russian SA-12 systems were not "interoperable," Ambassador Kunadze said that it would "not be that difficult to make alterations to the system, without any additional cost, so that it will fit the existing South Korean command and control system." Ambassador Kunadze further noted that the contract would not only be a substantial amount of Russia's total defense export but might be a good method of paying back some of Russia's estimated US$1.2 billion debt to the ROK. (Korea Herald, "COLD-WAR FOES BID FOR MISSILES TO SOUTH KOREA; AMBASSADOR KUNADZE SAYS RUSSIA HOPES FOR CHANCE FOR FAIR COMPETITION WITH U.S.," Kim Jisoo, 04/12/97)

2. DPRK Military Situation

Despite its looming famine and its latest political compromises, the DPRK remains a dangerous military threat, the head of US Joint Chiefs of Staff said Friday. The DPRK is expected to disclose next week whether it will agree to a long-standing US-ROK proposal for four-party talks aimed at achieving a permanent peace on the peninsula. Some people believe the DPRK will agree, citing the steps it has taken in the last two years, such as the signing of a nuclear accord with the US, apologizing to the ROK for sending a submarine into its waters, and reaching out to other countries for financial assistance to fight widespread starvation. General John Shalikashvili, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, warned Friday that US and ROK forces must remain "very vigilant and very ready for the unexpected," because the decline in the food and fuel shortages across the DPRK do not appear to have seriously affected its military. Moreover, the DPRK conducted its extensive winter exercise and its air force has been flying more flights in the last two or three years. (Korea Times, "NK REMAINS MILITARY RISK DESPITE LOOMING FAMINE," 04/11/97)

3. DPRK Prepares Missile Test-Fire

The DPRK appears to be preparing to test-fire Nodong-1 missiles capable of reaching most parts of Japan following a similar move last October, a US intelligence source was quoted as saying Friday. The source reportedly told Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK) that three missiles have been deployed at a base in the eastern part of the DPRK since February and were now in a position to fire, with seven more are ready to be deployed. A Japanese Defense Agency spokesman said that the deployment of Nodong missiles "has been a concern for us and we would have to monitor it

carefully." A US official expressed puzzlement over the move saying, "We don't understand (the DPRK's) intention as the move is being made at a time when the country is faced with a serious food shortage and seeking international aid." US and Japanese officials will reportedly meet next week to discuss the matter. In Seoul, on the other hand, a ROK defense ministry spokesman said he had no knowledge of the deployment. Last October, the US managed to dissuade the DPRK from test firing the missile over the Sea of Japan, following a similar test in mid-1993. The Nodong-1 can hit targets 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) away and could be fitted with nuclear or chemical warheads. (Korea Times, "NORTH KOREA PREPARING FOR ANOTHER TEST FIRING OF NODONG-1 MISSILE," 04/11/97)

4. Food Aid to DPRK

Representative Chung Jay-moon appealed for international efforts to lessen the acute food shortage in the DPRK during his address to the Inter-Parliamentary Conference, now underway in Seoul. "Given the degree of suffering in North Korea today, and the fact that the food crisis there has had a particularly harsh effect on children, we hope that our fellow IPU members will join in the efforts to provide aid to North Korea," Chung said in the IPU session Friday. Chung, the head of the ROK delegation, illustrated the current efforts of the ROK in providing aid and stressed the "importance of maintaining the stability and efficacy of the Non-Proliferation Treaty." Alluding to the proposed shipment of Taiwanese nuclear waste to the DPRK for storage, Chung said "the international community should take a united stand on principle against the shipment of nuclear waste across international borders." (Korea Times, "KOREAN DELEGATION TO IPU APPEALS FOR INT'L FOOD AID TO NK," 04/11/97)

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We invite you to reply to today's report, and we welcome commentary or papers for distribution to the network.

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