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I. United States

1. US-DPRK MIA Talks

The US Department of Defense ("DOD 5/10 STATEMENT U.S.-NORTH KOREA MIA TALKS," USIA Report, 5/12/97) released a statement on May 10 expressing disappointment that talks between the US and the DPRK on missing US servicemen (MIAs) from the Korean War ended in New York May 9 with no formal agreement and with no progress shown in resolving the issue. The statement, entitled "U.S. And North Korea Talks On Missing Servicemen End," read: "Talks between the United States and North Korea on missing servicemen from the Korean war ended in New York, Friday night, with no formal agreement. The negotiations began on Sunday, and focused on the fullest possible accounting of American servicemen in three broad areas: the question of live sightings of alleged Americans living in North Korea; access to North Korean military archives; and establishment of a schedule of joint operations to recover the remains of Americans buried in North Korea. James W. Wold, leader of the U.S. delegation, expressed disappointment that the talks ended with no

agreement and with no progress shown in resolving the issue. 'Despite assurances in advance of the talks with the North Koreans that we would deal conclusively with all issues, their delegation was unable to respond constructively to U.S. proposals in any of the three areas,' Wold said. 'I know that our family members and veterans are as disappointed as I am.' At the request of the Departm

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I. United States

1. US-DPRK MIA Talks

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The Associated Press ("U.S., N. KOREA MIA TALKS END," New York, 5/10/97) and Reuters ("US, NORTH KOREA MIA TALKS END WITHOUT PROGRESS," Washington, 5/10/97) reported the US Defense Department statement regarding the breakdown in US-DPRK MIA talks. The report added that Larry Greer, spokesman for the Defense Department's POW-MIA office, said that the DPRK delegation requested a one- or two-day extension of the talks Friday, but the US refused. Earlier Friday, relatives of some of the 8,100 US soldiers missing from the Korean War spoke with DPRK officials, the first such meeting ever. "It was extremely emotional. It was the first time I looked a North Korean in the eye since 1953," said David Fortune, national president of the Korean War Ex-POWs Association, who was held captive for 2 1/2 years. DPRK Ambassador Kim Byong-hong, who led the DPRK delegation to the talks, accepted questions and documents from the relatives, but made no promise to supply answers or meet with families again. [Ed. note: Please see related item in the ROK section, below.]

2. DPRK Defectors by Sea

The Associated Press ("NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS REACH SOUTH," Seoul, 5/12/97) and Reuters ("NORTH KOREANS MAKE HISTORY WITH BOAT ESCAPE," Inchon, ROK, 5/12/97) reported that fourteen "boat people" defected from the DPRK to the ROK on Monday, the first ever to leave by sea. The ROK Defense Ministry said the defectors' boat, disguised as a Chinese fishing trawler, was found near Paekryong-do, the westernmost ROK island. The group included five men, five women and four children, and was comprised of two families, one led by the boat's captain, Ahn Sun-kook, 48, and the other led by the boat's engineer. The Defense Ministry quoted the defectors as saying they left Shinuiju, in the DPRK, three days earlier, and had outwitted DPRK naval patrol craft before being spotted by ROK naval radar. There was no word on the reason for the defections, although some previous defectors have cited encroaching famine conditions in the DPRK as a motivation. The largest mass escape was by a group of seventeen -- including sixteen members of a single family -- that arrived in the ROK last December after a six-week long epic escape through PRC.

3. DPRK Famine Situation

The Associated Press ("N.KOREA FACING 'SLOW MOTION FAMINE'," Beijing, 5/12/97) and Reuters

("FAMINE IN N.KOREA LIKE TIME BOMB, WFP OFFICIAL SAYS," Beijing, 5/12/97) reported that Tun Myat, a director of logistics for the UN World Food Program, said Monday that local authorities in the DPRK have been told to fend for themselves in finding food for their people, and are selling scrap metal overseas to buy grain. Myat, who visited the DPRK this month, said severe shortages have prompted the government to delegate "a lot of autonomy" to officials outside the capital. Individuals are also eating seaweed, cakes made with ground-up tree bark and other "alternative foods" that are sustaining people who otherwise would already have starved, he said. "They ate barks and leaves, but not in the way that we would imagine anybody eating barks and leaves. It is done in a fairly ... systematic way, fairly sophisticated way. Stalks of corn, cobs of corn, empty pea and bean pods, mushroom stems and whatever that in most other countries would either have been thrown away or would have at best been used for animal feed are now being milled into powder," Myat said. The nutritional value of the alternative food is not known, and Myat said it was difficult to say when the "point of no return" would come. "The situation is ... almost a famine in slow motion," Myat said. "How long this process can last before the dire effects of protracted malnutrition take place, we don't know. I think the challenge to all of us would be to ensure that we don't ever find out." The World Food Program has asked for US\$96 million to buy food aid for North Korea, but has received just over US\$38 million, Myat said. Myat said that the World Food Program will deliver 120,000 tons of aid in May and June, and an additional 70,000 tons of corn is coming from the PRC, but that the DPRK will need 1.3 million tons of international aid this year. Myat said many government food warehouses they visited were empty and that one province of 2.2 million people had just 600 tons of grain. However, he did not see people dropping dead of hunger and said he did not believe reports that some are resorting to cannibalism.

The AP-Dow Jones News Service ("1997 N. KOREA SAYS MILITARY JOINING EFFORTS FOR BUMPER HARVEST," Tokyo, 5/12/97) reported that the DPRK's official Korean Central Radio said in a broadcast Sunday that the DPRK armed forces will be sent into the fields to ensue a bumper harvest this year. The broadcast said the military is uniting in a "fight to assist farm villages," and that this will "certainly bring about a great harvest this year." The broadcast provided no details of what kind of help the military was giving, other than its "revolutionary military spirit," according to a report Monday by Radiopress, a Japanese monitoring agency.

4. ROK Food Aid to DPRK

Reuters ("S. KOREAN RED CROSS TO SHIP CORN TO NORTH," Seoul, 5/12/97) reported that Lee Byung-woong, the secretary general of the ROK Red Cross, said on Monday that the organization plans to begin shipping 15,000 tons of corn to the DPRK next week. Lee said the ROK Red Cross also planned to give its DPRK counterpart an estimate of how much other food aid was planned, addressing the issue that created a deadlock in talks aimed at speeding up the shipment of aid. Inter-Korean Red Cross talks were held for the first time in nearly five years earlier this month, but stalled after the North demanded to know the exact amount of aid. The South wanted instead to discuss speeding up delivery of relief supplies to the North by handing over the aid directly rather than using the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as a go-between as in the past. "As direct delivery is not possible now, we plan to start sending next week 15,000 tons of corn via the IFRC," Lee said.

5. US View of DPRK War Threat

US State Department Spokesman Nicholas Burns ("STATE DEPT. NOON BRIEFING, MAY 9," USIA Transcript, 5/12/97) responded to media reports that DPRK defector Hwang Jang-yop has told interrogators that the DPRK has increased its preparedness for war with Kim Jong-il's ascension to power. [Ed. note: Please see "Hwang Assertions of DPRK War Threat" in the May 9 Daily Report.] Burns said that he "wouldn't put too much stock" in "a secondhand report of what Mr. Hwang may

have said to a South Korean official." Burns continued, "All of our indications are that North Korea wishes to open up its relations with the United States and South Korea on the food question, on the agreed frame work, on the issue of possible normalization of our relations at some point down the road, on the issue of the four-party talks. So, we are not moving in the direction of war." Asked when the US would be able to interview Hwang directly, Burns said, "Well, we've been assured we will have access to him. I guarantee to you we will not announce that ahead of time. I don't even know if we'll announce it after the fact. But I am sure we are going to talk to him. The South Koreans are our allies. They have made a commitment to us and they always keep their commitments to us."

5. ROK Support for DPRK Bank Membership

The AP-Dow Jones News Service ("S. KOREA OFFICIAL CALLS FOR N. KOREA'S ADMISSION TO ADB," Fukuoka, Japan, 5/12/97) reported that ROK Finance Minister Kang Kyong-shik told the board of governors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) that the DPRK should be granted membership so that it could receive aid needed to avoid a famine. "Considering the ADB's invaluable contribution to the rapid progress of the Korean economy, I think it is clear that North Korea would also benefit from ADB membership," Kang told the 56-member bank board at its 30th annual meeting. Kang said that admitting the DPRK would help it fight its chronic food shortages, which already have begun to claim lives. Kang also stressed that welcoming the DPRK as a member of the international community would encourage the secretive Pyongyang regime to end its isolation. "This alone would contribute significantly to the political and economic stability of East Asia," Kang said. The ADB is split over accepting communist the DPRK: the ROK and the PRC support the move, but Japan, the ADB's biggest donor, appears reluctant.

6. Plot Against DPRK Leader Reported

Reuters ("NORTH KOREANS MAKE HISTORY WITH BOAT ESCAPE," Inchon, ROK, 5/12/97) reported that a DPRK defector living in Seoul claimed that in 1995 DPRK authorities foiled a plot by cadets at a military academy to assassinate top leader Kim Jong-il. The defector wrote in an article published by the ROK's Nae-woe Press that the cadets planned to ax Kim to death during a martial arts display, but the plot was uncovered and the ringleaders were executed. The article added that there had been numerous plots since the 1970s to kill both Kim Jong-il and his father, former "Great Leader" Kim Il-sung, who died in 1994.

II. Republic of Korea

1. US-DPRK MIA Talks

Relatives of US servicemen who disappeared during the Korean War more than 40 years ago failed Friday to obtain concrete promises from a DPRK delegation at an unprecedented and emotional meeting. The relatives told journalists after the meeting at a New York hotel that DPRK delegation chief Kim Byong-hong informed them categorically that "there are no live American prisoners in North Korea." The delegation accepted their petitions about their missing loved ones and said the documents would be passed on to Pyongyang. The relatives and Korean war veterans in the seventeen-member delegation expressed mixed views about the results of their first face-to-face meeting with DPRK representatives in 44 years. Some expressed optimism, while others were bitter and pledged to contact their Congressional representatives to urge Washington to slow the dispatch of economic aid in protest. The DPRK delegates said that a dialogue with US Defense Department officials on the fate of the 8,100 Americans who disappeared during the 1950-53 Korean war would continue. Talks between the Defense Department delegation and the DPRK delegation, which got underway here on Sunday, were expected to continue late Friday and possibly into Saturday, Defense Department spokesman Larry Greer said. US officials had hoped to reach an agreement

with Kim's team by Friday on plans to investigate alleged sightings in the DPRK of US prisoners of war (POWs), joint excavation of war crash sites, and access to DPRK war archives. Besides searching for missing in action (MIA) remains, the Defense Department wants to visit areas of the DPRK where defectors and visitors recently have reported seeing live US prisoners. (Korea Times, "NO FIRM PROMISES FROM N.KOREANS AT MIA MEETING," 05/11/97)

2. US View of DPRK War Threat

US State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns downplayed DPRK defector Hwang Jong-yap's claims of ongoing war preparations in the DPRK, calling them "secondhand reports of what Mr. Hwang may have said to a South Korean official." Burns said the US is fully prepared to defend the ROK when necessary, but reiterated that Korea is "not moving in the direction of war." The ROK press reported that Hwang testified that his country has been preparing for war ever since de facto leader Kim Jong-il took over the military, and that there is a "war atmosphere." The press quoted Kwon Young-hae, director of the Agency for National Security Planning, who testified at the National Assembly on the results of Hwang's questioning. Burns made assurances that, "All the situation indicates now is that the DPRK wishes to open up its relations with the US and the ROK on the food question, on the agreed framework, and on the issue of four-party talks." Regarding a meeting between US officials and Hwang, Burns said the US has been "assured" it will have access to the defector. (Korea Times, "US DOWNPLAYS DEFECTOR HWANGS CLAIM OF 'WAR ATMOSPHERE' IN NK," 05/11/97)

3. PRC Aid to DPRK

PRC President Jiang Zemin pledged Friday to help the DPRK, which is facing large-scale famine due to grain shortages. "North Korea is a close neighbor of China which has traditionally enjoyed a close friendship. At present they are facing difficulties with grain and we can assist them within our own capability," Jiang said in an interview with the US-based television network CNN. Although the PRC has "a strong interest in stability on the Korean peninsula," Jiang ruled out any political intervention in the isolated Stalinist state, saying that "it is our consistent principle that we will not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries." The PRC went to the DPRK's assistance in the 1950-53 Korean War, but warm ties cooled as the PRC started its economic reform program and then established diplomatic ties with Pyongyang's rival, the ROK, in 1992. However, the PRC recently announced it would ship 70,000 tons of emergency grain supplies to its starving neighbor. According to the International Federation of Red Cross Societies, farmers in the DPRK's countryside are already facing starvation because the last rations of grain ran out in mid-March. (Korea Times, "CHINESE PRES. JIANG PLEDGES TO HELP N. KOREA," 05/11/97)

4. DPRK Leadership

The power balance among the Workers' Party, people's army and intelligence organizations has been shaken and military hard-liners willing to go to war have gained more power in the DPRK since the start of the Kim Jong-il regime, the Tokyo Shimbun reported from Vladivostok on Saturday. Quoting an analysis by a Far East Russian intelligence office, the Japanese daily said that in the wake of Kim Il-sung's death, relations between Kim Jong-il and the military have soured mainly because People's Armed Forces Minister O Jin-u and other top military leaders strongly opposed the junior Kim's succession to power. Kim Jong-il's terms with O's successor, Marshal Choe Kwang, also deteriorated. Choe, who died in February, demanded "an army able to defend the fatherland," contending that his forces, at their present condition, were bound to lose a war, it said. Key military officers were later replaced with "new generation" officers like general political bureau director Jo Myong-rok, the report said. It added that with the replacements providing momentum, Kim Jong-il had begun to take a hardline policy, ordering in May 1995 preparations for guerrilla warfare, such as the excavation of

underground facilities across the country. The paper said Kim believes that "a small country with powerful weapons can crush a large country," and that the backbone of the DPRK's guerrilla forces was the special unit responsible for last year's submarine intrusion. Meanwhile, the recent placement of the border security forces under the control of the People's Army indicates that the influence of intelligence setups such as the border security forces, the 120,000-man special units, and the counter-espionage bureau, has weakened. Up until 1988 counter-espionage agents were trained in Moscow but such training ceased to exist since the fall of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the paper said, all the staff of the DPRK consulate general in Nathodka who were able to speak Russian were summoned to Pyongyang following Hwang Jang-yop's defection, apparently to forestall their possible escape to Russia. Russian analysts believe the influence of the Workers' Party, too, has declined due to the failure of economic policies under Kim Jong-il's regime, the Japanese daily added. (Korea Times, "MILITARY HARDLINERS RISE IN NK LEADERSHIP: JAPANESE DAILY," 05/11/97)

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

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

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