NAPSNet Daily Report 13 May, 1997

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 13 May, 1997", NAPSNet Daily Report, May 13, 1997, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-13-may-1997/

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I. United States

1. DPRK-Taiwan Nuclear Waste Deal

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2. US View of Current DPRK Relations

US State Department Spokesman Nicholas Burns ("STATE DEPT. NOON BRIEFING, MAY 13," USIA Transcript, 5/13/97), asked by reporters what the US has heard from the DPRK regarding the proposal for four-party peace talks, replied, "Silence." Asked what the US has heard from the DPRK regarding the recently postponed talks on missile proliferation, Burns replied, "Silence from Pyongyang." Asked what this lack of response means to the US, Burns said, "They have to get back to us on the four-party talks. There is an open invitation. They have to get back, of course, on the missile proliferation talks. We are working well, monitoring the agreed framework; that is in place." Burns then commented on other dimensions of the relationship. "The MIA talks proceeded last week, but I can't point to any breakthroughs for you. Unfortunately that is a very serious issue for American families in the United States. On food aid, we are proceeding with our shipments of food; the ships are arriving," Burns said. Asked what was "the bottom line here," Burns replied, "It is very difficult for us to read the North Koreans and to tell you why all this is happening. They are opaque."

3. DPRK Boat Defectors

The Associated Press (J. H. Ahn, "NORTH KOREANS STARVED FOR FREEDOM," Inchon, ROK, 5/13/97) and Reuters ("SOUTH KOREANS FEAR BOAT PEOPLE INVASION," Seoul, 5/13/97) reported that the fourteen defectors who fled the DPRK by boat and arrived in the ROK Tuesday said that DPRK citizens are starved for freedom as well as food. "I have been listening to South Korean radio since seven years ago and come to know that there is real freedom here," said Ahn Sun-kuk, 49, leader of the group. "We came for freedom," added engineer Kim Won-hyung, 57, whose family of eight included his two year-old grandson. After a long voyage through rough seas, the defectors -- five men, five women and four children -- looked tired but smiled constantly. Carrying his 68-year-old mother on his back and holding an umbrella in the drizzling rain, Ahn led others in shouting cheers to dozens of reporters. Asked by reporters about the DPRK food situation, Ahn shouted in response, "It's miserable." The group was then immediately taken away by intelligence officials for questioning. ROK Defense Minister Kim Dong-jin said the escape was financed by Kim Won-hyung's twin brother, US citizen Kim Il-hyung. The brothers met in the PRC in April and the American gave his brother US$20,000 to finance the flight. The brothers then bought the escape ship for US$5,500 in the PRC and registered it as an official DPRK vessel after bribing local officials, the minister said. Other Defense Ministry officials said Ahn and his family left Shinuiju, a DPRK port on the border

with the PRC, on Friday. They had emergency food, a radio set and a portable phone which the brothers had bought in the PRC to prepare for the defection. During the group's 27-hour voyage, they mixed with a fleet of Chinese fishing boats to avoid detection by DPRK patrols. While some ROK media suggested that a mass exodus by sea might be imminent, others pointed out that the costs involved put such an option out of reach to most DPRK residents.

II. Republic of Korea

1. ROK, US Deny Spying Cases Link

Public interest has been drawn to two "spy" cases, one in the ROK and the other in the US. In the ROK, an Air Force officer, identified as Lt. Col. Kim Tae-jun, has been arrested on charges of leaking classified military secrets concerning the country's procurement plans to Donald Ratcliffe, a US citizen. Ratcliffe, representing the US defense contractor Litton Industry Inc., was arrested on charges of violating the Law on the Protection of Military Secrets. According to military lawyers, the charges carry up to 10 years in prison, but based on the prosecution of past cases, Ratcliffe likely faces a maximum of three to four years of imprisonment if convicted, with a chance of a suspended sentence. In the US, meanwhile, Robert Chaegon, a Korean American, was charged with espionage for handing over US secrets concerning the DPRK and the PRC to a military attache at the ROK embassy in Washington while working at the Office of Naval Intelligence last year. Kim reportedly has accepted a plea bargain involving admission to a less serious charge of obtaining classified information. Kim would have faced life imprisonment if he was convicted of espionage, but now could be freed in less than ten years. Some reports suggest a conspiracy linking the two cases together, with some US mass media suggesting that the ROK intentionally broke the Ratcliffe case so as to enable Kim, an ONI employee, to receive a light sentence. This supposed connection is possible, some people believe, because Kim is seen by many in the ROK as a patriot working in the interest of his native country, and because there has been some organized movement in his support since he was arrested, spearheaded by an influential local newspaper. However, the governments of the two countries deny such connections. An officer at the ROK Defense Security Command, which worked together with the Agency for National Security Planning on the Ratcliffe case, said that the two cases were not connected and the arrest timing was a coincidence. "Litton has won 15 billion won worth of defense contracts from Korea with profits of 600 million won. The profits were gone after a couple years and Ratcliffe became desperate to scout for clues of what Korea would need for the future and how to turn that into another contract." A spokesman for the US embassy in Seoul said that it has not even followed the case. A US military official stationed in Korea indicated that there had been some anticipation in US military circles that some kind of "tit for tat" retaliation would occur in connection with the Robert Kim case, albeit not an official one. He also pointed out that Korea's case against Ratcliffe is rather flimsy. "I understand that the NSP interrogators questioned him about a surveillance map concerning Korea's required operational capabilities on its spy plane acquisition project," he said. "That info has probably been declassified among defense contractors in the US for quite some time."(Korea Times, "KOREA, US DENY CONNECTION BETWEEN TWO SPYING CASES ON BOTH SIDES OF PACIFIC," 05/13/97)

III. Commentary

1. Opinion Article by Stephen Costello

The following opinion article was submitted to NAPSNet by Stephen Costello of the Kim Dae-jung Peace Foundation-USA:

American officials are ignoring the development of unhealthy conditions in South Korea, with the potential for continued instability in Northeast Asia and policy confusion in Washington and Seoul

beyond the year 2000. The past four years should have been a wake-up call in this regard. South Koreans had reason to expect that the first civilian government in 30 years would proceed boldly with political and economic reform, and lose the authoritarian impulse to treat confrontation with North Korea as a useful tool for domestic support. Instead, these years have witnessed an insecure South Korean president relying on narrow and shallow support groups to battle imagined enemies at home. The real interests of both South Korea and the U.S. on the Korean peninsula have suffered.

In the process, the U.S.-South Korean partnership has been strained, but not broken. It will surely survive this period, and will likely emerge stronger than ever. Recently retired Ambassador to Korea James Laney was a master at making this point while at the same time urging ROK leaders to begin acting like legitimate representatives of the stronger of the two Koreas, rather than one of two equal rivals in a peninsula-sized sandbox. With a new Korean president elected in December, the next five years will be the most decisive in a generation.

They will be decisive for the U.S., which will either coordinate a policy of deterrence and enticement of North Korea together with the South or continue to react to the wildly fluctuating diplomatic and military crises caused by two unstable Korean governments; for North Korea, which will either collapse, open up, or become aggressively violent; and for South Korea, which faces either continued corruption, weakness and incoherence -- or the consolidation of democratic institutions with political, economic and North Korean policy reform.

The real challenge for U.S. policy-makers is to focus now on the character and capabilities of the post-Kim Young Sam South Korean government. Agreement between Washington and Seoul on short- and medium-term goals and coordination of policies to achieve them has been extremely difficult during the past four years. Much will depend on whether this relationship changes early next year. Viewed from Washington, does it make a difference which party wins the Korean presidency in December? While claiming, as always, that the U.S. intends to stay out of internal politics, should the administration exert pressure for fair elections and avoid being used by the government at election time?

These are questions not seriously asked among most U.S. officials. The answers are important, and logically lead toward a strong push for increased fairness in this year's campaign. And fairness is sorely needed. Virtually all political donations during the Kim Young Sam administration have gone to the ruling party, because donors expect tax trouble if they give to the opposition. Electronic and other media are heavily influenced by the government, as is the judicial system. The first local elections in a generation were supposed to spur devolution of power to the regional and municipal governments after 1995, but the government has instead increased control. Only with fair elections will the next Korean government rule with the legitimacy and authority that come from broad-based support and voters with a stake in democratic reform. And only by speaking up loudly for the longstanding American ideal of fair elections in one of our closest and most valuable allies in the world will the Clinton administration show support for democratic progress in Korea and increase the chance that the next Korean president will truly be a partner.

The NAPSNet Daily Report aims to serve as a forum for dialogue and exchange among peace and security specialists. Conventions for readers and a list of acronyms and abbreviations are available to all recipients. For descriptions of the world wide web sites used to gather information for this report, or for more information on web sites with related information, see the collection of other NAPSNet resources.
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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