

NAPSNet Daily Report 15 February, 2008

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 15 February, 2008", NAPSNet Daily Report, February 15, 2008,
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-15-february-2008/>

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I. NAPSNet

1. US on DPRK Nuclear Issue

Korea Herald ("TOP U.S. NUCLEAR ENVOY TO VISIT SEOUL", 2008/02/14) reported that Christopher Hill, US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, will visit Seoul and other northeast Asian countries beginning next Tuesday to prepare for a tour by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Hill is expected in Seoul from Tuesday to Wednesday, after visiting Beijing. The third leg of his trip will be Tokyo.

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2. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Yonhap (Shim Sun-ah, "INTER-KOREAN TALKS ON N. KOREA HIGHWAY MAKE NO PROGRESS", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that the ROK and DPRK closed their working-level talks on repairing a major expressway in the DPRK without an agreement, the Unification Ministry said. The meeting was the first of its kind after the leaders of the two Koreas agreed in their October summit on a variety of joint projects, including the repair of the dilapidated highway linking Kaesong and the capital, Pyongyang. During the two-day meeting in Kaesong, the two sides failed to narrow differences over how to inspect and renovate the road, as well as the purpose of the renovation, according to the ministry. However, they adopted a joint report on the result of two on-site surveys of the highway conducted jointly by their officials in December, the ministry said in a press release.

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3. Inter-Korean Relations

Yonhap (Yoo Cheong-mo, "ROH DISGRACED AT TREE-PLANTING CEREMONY IN PYONGYANG", Seoul, 2008/02/15) reported that the Munhwa Ilbo disclosed on Thursday that the ROK summit delegation was forced to cancel its plan to install President Roh Moo-hyun's inscribed stone slab in front of a commemorative tree planted by the president at a botanic garden in downtown Pyongyang

on Oct. 4, due to the objection of DPRK authorities over the size of the stone weighing 250 kilograms. The DPRK officials contended that giant stone monuments on DPRK soil can be erected only in the name of its leader and his deceased father, Kim Il-sung. The ROK delegation brought the slab back to Seoul, and sent a smaller weighing just 70 kilograms to Pyongyang via its spy chief Kim Man-bok on the eve of the presidential election last December. Presidential spokesperson Cheon Ho-seon said that the ROK delegation "voluntarily" brought back the stone slab, because DPRK leader Kim Jong-il failed to show up at the tree-planting ceremony.

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4. DPRK Tourism

Yonhap (Shim Sun-ah, "PYONGYANG TO START USING BUSES WITH AIR CONDITIONING: REPORT", Seoul, 2008/02/12) reported that the DPRK will begin using more than a hundred new buses with air conditioning for the convenience of a growing number of foreigners visiting Pyongyang, a U.S. government-funded radio station reported. Pyongyang's municipal people's committee recently requested a PRC bus manufacturer to install air conditioning in 110 new buses to be used in the capital city, Radio Free Asia said. "North Korea is introducing buses with air conditioning to make Pyongyang look more advanced and urban in the eyes of foreign tourists whose number is on the rise," the radio report said.

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5. UN Aid to the DPRK

Yonhap ("U.N. APPEALS FOR \$15 MILLION TO HELP N.K. CHILDREN", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that a UN relief agency has appealed for US\$15 million in emergency aid for DPRK children, citing the needs of the children "made more vulnerable" by last year's massive flooding. The funding is supposed to cover medicines, supplements, water systems and educational facilities and supplies for DPRK children, the U.N. Children's Fund said in its Humanitarian Action Report 2008 released. "Despite improvements in the political context, the availability and quality of basic social services in health, nutrition, water supply and education for women and children, especially for over 2 million under-five children and 300,000 pregnant women, will continue to rely critically on the support of international community," the report said.

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6. ROK-US Military Relations

Yonhap ("SEOUL, WASHINGTON AGREE TO BOOST INFORMATION EXCHANGE", Seoul, 2008/02/15) reported that the ROK and the United States signed an agreement Friday that will help boost cooperation between their militaries in information and communication technologies, the ROK Defense Ministry said. The sealed document calls for increased cooperation between the countries' militaries in the information technology sector while also calling for an annual forum of their information-communication officials. "One of the purposes for establishing the forum is to secure close cooperation between South Korea and the United States in their command system before the transfer of the OPCON, so they can effectively support joint missions of their militaries," the ministry said in a released statement.

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7. ROK-US Joint Military Exercise

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "US STRYKER BRIGADE TO ARRIVE HERE", 2008/02/14) reported that a US Stryker Platoon from Alaska will be deployed to the ROK Feb. 15, the ROK-US Combined Forces Command said. The deployment of the Stryker vehicles is part of the upcoming Key Resolve command post exercise of ROK and U.S. troops from March 2 to 7, it said in a news release. The Stryker is a family of eight-wheel-drive armored combat vehicles used by the U.S. Army. Based on the Canadian LAVIII light-armored vehicle, which in turn is based on the Swiss Mowag Piranha, the Stryker is the U.S. Army's first new armored vehicle since the M2 Bradley in the 1980s.

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8. DPRK Economy

IFES NK Brief ("DPRK LIGHT INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION GROWS WITH ROK MATERIAL AID", 2008/02/14) reported that as ROK materials used in light industry make their way to the DPRK, some DPRK factories appear to returning to normal manufacturing operations. A source in the DPRK recently reported, "Raw rubber, talcum (used for soap), perfumes, textiles, and other ROK raw materials made their way to a Sinuiju shoe factory and cosmetics factory, and production has returned to normal." According to the source, "9 containers of soap powder came to the soap department of the Sinuiju cosmetics factory. The factory is in full operation and most workers are reporting for work...Workers are receiving monthly wages and food rations, and [they] almost never come out to the traditional market."

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9. US-ROK Trade Relations

Joongang Ilbo (Jung Ha-won and Ko Jung-ae, "CONTROVERSIAL FTA PACT GETS COMMITTEE APPROVAL", 2008/02/14) reported that lawmakers here sent the bill to approve the ROK-US free trade agreement to the National Assembly's main session yesterday, moving the controversial trade pact closer to ratification. But the trade pact still has a long way to go. Lawmakers have to first hold a public forum, scheduled Feb. 15. The pact also needs a series of approvals from the legislative review subcommittee, the standing committee and the general assembly. It remains uncertain whether the lawmakers, facing a national election in April for every legislative seat, would be willing to risk losing votes from rural-area farmers by supporting the trade pact.

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10. ROK Energy Supply

The Financial Times (Anna Fifield, "SOUTH KOREA WINS KURDISTAN OIL CONTRACT", Seoul, 2008/02/14) reported that the ROK signed a deal to explore and develop four oil fields in Kurdistan, an agreement that would give it a foothold in the untapped northern region of Iraq. The deal comes as the ROK, the world's fourth biggest oil importer, aggressively steps up its resource diplomacy.

But it could be a political and legal minefield - the deal is with the Kurdish regional government so is likely to be disputed by the Iraqi national government. According to the deal, the consortium - which also includes SK Energy and Daesung Industrial - will have the right to explore and develop four oil fields in Kurdistan, thought to contain reserves of at least 1bn barrels. That would be a fifth more than the ROK's annual oil consumption of 800m barrels.

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11. Japan Defense

Agence France-Presse ("ONLY NKOREAN MISSILE CAN 'WAKE UP' JAPAN, SAYS TOKYO GOVERNOR", Tokyo, 2008/02/14) reported that Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara says the Japanese have lost their national pride, and only an outside provocation like a DPRK missile launch can shake them out of their complacency. Ishihara, an unrepentant nationalist who heads the world's largest metropolis, has warned that Japan could become a US or PRC colony if its people do not act to protect themselves. Ishihara said the Japanese were reluctant to try to change the US-Japan alliance even if they were "dissatisfied" with it. "At the same time they do not desire a Japan with a strong military either. Because of that odd contradictory sentiment, Japan is gradually becoming colonised," he said.

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12. USFJ Base Realignment

The Asahi Shimbun ("TOKYO FEARS FOR U.S. REALIGNMENT PLAN", 2008/02/14) reported that government officials fear the alleged rape of a 14-year-old girl in Okinawa Prefecture by a U.S. Marine could lead to widespread public outrage that may stymie the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba indicated at a news conference Tuesday that words may not be enough to quell the latest criticism. "This is a time when we are sincerely working on the realignment of U.S. troops in Japan with the cooperation of people in Okinawa," Ishiba said. "I know the issue will not see closure with just the government asking the U.S. side to prevent a recurrence."

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13. US-Japan Security Alliance

The Associated Press (Joseph Coleman, "US MILITARY IN JAPAN WEIGHS NEW CURFEWS", Tokyo, 2008/02/14) reported that the US military in Japan has ordered a review of its anti-sexual assault guidelines and could impose new curfews or other restrictions following a Marine's arrest on suspicion of rape, the top commander said. Lt. Gen. Bruce Wright, commander of US forces in Japan, said he ordered a task force representing all the arms of the military to examine anti-sexual assault education programs and come up with recommendations for improvements. The review is to take two to four weeks, he told a news conference.

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14. Cross Strait Relations

Yomiuri Shimbun (Toshinao Ishii , "TAIWAN RULING PARTY BACKS OPPOSITION MOVE ON U.N. BID", 2008/02/14) reported that Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party led by President Chen Shui-bian has decided to support an opposition proposal to hold a national referendum on a bid to gain membership of the United Nations under the name of the Republic of China, a formula that would signal a softer stance on independence from the PRC. The national referendum is scheduled to be held on March 22 in conjunction with the presidential election.

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15. PRC on Espionage Allegations

Agence France-Presse (Peter Harmsen, "CHINA TELLS US TO DROP COLD WAR ATTITUDE AFTER 'SPY' ARRESTS", Beijing , 2008/02/14) reported that the PRC told the United States to drop its "Cold War" attitude and stop accusing Beijing of espionage, after US authorities arrested four people on charges of spying for the PRC. "The so-called accusation against China on the issue of espionage is totally groundless," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said. "We urge the United States to abandon its Cold War thinking and stop groundless accusations and instead contribute to mutual trust and friendship between our two peoples."

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16. PRC Olympics

Reuters ("BUSH SAYS WON'T USE OLYMPICS TO CRITICIZE CHINA", London, 2008/02/14) reported that US President George W. Bush said he would go to the PRC for the Olympics but would not talk publicly there about Beijing's policies since he urges its president in private to do more to relieve suffering in Darfur. "I am not going to go and use the Olympics as an opportunity to express my opinions to the Chinese people in a public way because I do it all the time with the President."

Reuters ("CHINA TARGETS UNREST IN OLYMPICS YEAR", Beijing, 2008/02/14) reported that the PRC will seek to head off any riots or protests that could mar its showcase Olympics Game year through secret investigations and punishment of errant officials, state media reported. The PRC's Communist Party leaders have been alarmed by growing petitions, protests and mass petitions in past years, worries that have intensified in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics, which open in August. The Party's Central Committee for Comprehensive Management of Public Security has announced steps to stifle sources of unrest. Hotspots of instability would attract secret probes, surveys and joint investigations, the China Police Daily reported.

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II. ROK Report

17. ROK Aid to DPRK

DongA Ilbo ("GOVERNMENT TACITLY PERMITS DPRK AID DIVERTED TO MILITARY", 2008/02/15)

said in an op-ed that it has been ascertained that the rice aid the ROK government send to the DPRK has been diverted to their military force, instead of the hungry civilians. It is even more shocking that the government has known this for the whole period and has been tacitly permitting them to do so. The only thing they did in yesterday's revelation was to announce an extremely vague solution to the matter. The government should clarify why such a matter has been overlooked and who was responsible for this shocking truth. Since it is highly likely that the current government is neither willing to nor capable to do so, the incoming government should take the responsibility.

Hankook Ilbo ("DPRK RICE AID NOT FOR MILITARY", 2008/02/15) said in an op-ed that the fact that the ROK's rice aid toward the DPRK has been transferred to the DPRK military force, which violated the initial humanitarian purpose of this aid severely. It is highly unacceptable for the ROK people as well. The government should investigate the details and require the DPRK to correct this matter. Even though the government said that they tried to enlarge their monitoring system since they heard about the aid diversion, it did not seem to take any actual actions about this. The government should make sure that the rice aid won't be maintained unless the distribution matter is clarified.

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18. ROK Policy Toward DPRK

Korea Institute for Future Strategies ("YEAR PASSED SINCE 2.13 TREATY: IS DPRK UNCLEAR DRAMA 'DEJA-VU'? ", 2008/02/14) carried a special article written by Lee Sang Hyun, the chairman of Korea Institute for Future Strategies. He said that the new administration has set the DPRK dismantlement as the first diplomatic issue and put national interest to be the first priority in judging diplomatic policies. Because of this, if the issue of DPRK unclear dismantlement cannot be overcome, the new ROK administration might encounter a difficult situation in its relationship with DPRK on this issue. Therefore, it is inevitable to consider other choices to make current policies fit well into the reality. The administration should adjust its course flexibly at the right time.

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Nautilus Institute
2342 Shattuck Ave. #300, Berkeley, CA 94704 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:
nautilus@nautilus.org