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CONTENTS

I. United States

1. DPRK Asylum Seekers
2. Taiwan-US Defense Conference
3. DPRK-US Relations
4. US Missile Defense
5. PRC Domestic Assessment
6. Philippines-US Anti-terror War

II. Republic of Korea 1. DPRK Asylum Seekers
2. ROK Response to DPRK Asylum Seekers
3. DPRK-US Relations

III. Announcements 1. Eurasian Railways Symposium

I. United States

1. DPRK Asylum Seekers

Reuters (Rosemarie Francisco, "N.KOREANS TO HEAD FOR S.KOREA AFTER MANILA STOPOVER," Manila, 03/15/02) and Agence France- Presse ("NORTH KOREANS EN ROUTE TO MANILA AS CHINA EMBASSY STAND- OFF ENDS," 03/15/02) reported that twenty-five DPRK asylum seekers -- six families and two orphaned girls -- left the Spanish embassy compound in Beijing on Friday bound for Manila, a little more than 24 hours after they sought refuge. They will likely leave Manila for the ROK the following day in the largest DPRK mass defection since the Korean War. "We have diplomatic ties with North Korea and we would like to maintain good relations with both North and South Korea so if ever they will come here it will only be for transit and will not be entering Philippine territory," Foreign Affairs Secretary Teofisto Guingona told reporters. Guingona added that he had no communications with the DPRK government about this issue. The ROK has said it would accept the 25 once it verified that they wanted to come to the ROK.

2. Taiwan-US Defense Conference

Agence France-Presse ("MEETING WITH TAIWAN MINISTER A COURTESY CALL : US OFFICIAL," 03/15/02) reported that US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly spoke publicly for the first time about his meeting with Taiwan defense minister Tang Yao-ming this week, saying the subject of US arms sales to the island did not come up. Kelly stated, "I had a brief courtesy meeting with the minister, Tang Yao-ming, we were both attending a private business meeting." Kelly was asked at a press conference if he had discussed the issue of nuclear weapons with Taiwan, following reports quoting a leaked US planning document that suggested the PRC could be included on a list of potential targets of the US nuclear arsenal. "We not only didn't discuss atomic weapons, we didn't discuss any other weapons systems," Kelly said.

3. DPRK-US Relations

Reuters ("ANGRY N.KOREA REVIEWING ALL DEALS WITH U.S.," Seoul, 03/13/02) reported that the DPRK has said it is examining agreements it has with the US. On Wednesday, the official news agency KCNA said the DPRK reacted strongly to the US Nuclear Posture Review by issuing a statement saying the US nuclear review was "a daydream of reckless persons." "Under the present situation where nuclear lunatics have taken office in the White House, we are compelled to examine all the agreements with the US," said the statement issued by KCNA. "In case the US plan for a nuclear attack on the DPRK turns out to be true, the DPRK will have no option but to take a substantial countermeasure against it, not bound to any DPRK-US agreement," the ministry said.

4. US Missile Defense

Reuters (Tabassum Zakaria, "MILITARY SET FOR ANTI-MISSILE TEST OVER PACIFIC," Washington, 03/15/02) reported that the US prepared on Friday to make its sixth and most challenging attempt to shoot down a mock nuclear warhead in space over the Pacific Ocean in its missile defense test program. In the test, scheduled for a four-hour window beginning on Friday night, a projectile weapon fired from Kwajalein Atoll in the Pacific will attempt to intercept and destroy a mock warhead launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, about 4,800 miles (7,725 km) away. The test is costing more than US$100 million and will deploy three inflated balloons in space to see if a test weapon trying to track and collide with the warhead can be diverted from its mission. Previous tests have used only one speeding balloon near the warhead. The Pentagon later this year plans to begin a more robust testing program, which it said has been slowed by the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty.

5. PRC Domestic Assessment

Reuters (Jeremy Page, "CHINA'S ZHU DEFENDS LEGACY BUT QUIET ON SUCCESSOR," Beijing, 03/15/02) reported that at the closing of the annual two-week session of the National People's Congress (NPC), PRC Premier Zhu Rongji defended his legacy on Friday as the no-nonsense reformer who shook up the PRC's centrally planned economy. Zhu said he had "basically fulfilled" all the goals he set for himself when he took over as premier in 1998--including streamlining the state sector and party bureaucracy. "I think this government has made good its promise. We have a clear conscience, but still there is big room for improvement and we must continue to work hard," Zhu said. Zhu did express that his biggest challenge was trying to improve the livelihoods of 800 million farmers following the PRC's entry to the World Trade Organization in December. Zhu dodged three questions about who would take over after he steps down from Communist Party. "I have answered

countless such questions in the past and every time I answer, my answer gives rise to unjustifiable speculation," Zhu said, when asked whether he might stay on for another term as premier. "So I will answer your question in the way I did earlier--please be patient, the answer will be out fairly soon."

6. Philippines-US Anti-terror War

Agence France-Presse ("SPECIAL FORCES TO JOIN COUNTER-INSURGENCY PATROLS IN PHILIPPINES," Zamboanga, 03/15/02) reported that small US Special Forces units are to join Filipino troops in patrols in the southern Philippines island stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf Muslim guerrilla group next week, Philippines military officials said Friday. But the officials insisted the US units would only be joining "field training exercises" on Basilan island and would not engage in actual combat. "Their special forces and our special forces will conduct some special operations training activity," military southern command spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Danilo Servando said.

II. Republic of Korea

1. DPRK Asylum Seekers

Joongang Ilbo (Yoo Kwang-jong, "REFUGEES STORM OFFICE IN BEIJING," Beijing, 03/15/02) reported that a group of DPRK refugees sought asylum at the Spanish Embassy in Beijing Thursday. The group of about 20 people claimed that they were fleeing persecution from the Kim Jong-il regime and asked to be sent to the ROK. They threatened to commit suicide if returned to the DPRK. International relations experts say the incident will be a problem for the PRC, as the PRC government is bound by a treaty with the DPRK to return anyone fleeing the regime. Zhang Qiyue, PRC spokesperson, said that the DPRK citizens' entry into the embassy should be regarded as "illegal." But she added that the group would be treated under "humanitarian principles."

2. ROK Response to DPRK Asylum Seekers

The Korea Herald (Kim Ji-ho, "SEOUL LODGES 'HUMANITARIAN' REQUEST," Seoul, 03/15/02) reported that the ROK government has asked the PRC and Spain to allow the 25 DPRK asylum seekers to choose their destination freely and to deal with the case in a humanitarian way, ROK officials said Thursday. The request was delivered through the ROK's diplomatic channels to the two governments, which will determine through negotiations the fate of the defectors. The ROK made the same request to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), according to the officials. The government has also launched consultations with the PRC, trying to first prevent the PRC from sending the group back to its homeland, where the asylum seekers claim they will face life-threatening persecution. Last year, 583 DPRK defectors came to the ROK, an increase from 1999 when the comparable figure stood at 148. A total of 123 defectors have sought asylum in the ROK so far this year.

3. DPRK-US Relations

Joongang Ilbo (Oh Young-hwan, "NORTH TIES PAST PACTS, U.S. REVIEW," Seoul, 03/15/02) reported that the DPRK threatened Thursday to reconsider all agreements with the US in light of the US nuclear posture review. The 1993 US-DPRK Joint Statement and the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework, in particular, should be re- examined, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson emphasized. It is

the first time the DPRK has officially alluded to the possibility of terminating the Geneva agreement. US President George W. Bush said Wednesday that all options for using nuclear weapons remain open. US Undersecretary of State John Bolton told the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun Thursday that a review of the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework is impending.

III. Announcements

1. Eurasian Railways Symposium

Officials and experts from Northeast Asia--the PRC, Mongolia, the DPRK, the ROK, and Japan, along with their colleagues from Russia, the European Union and the Nordic countries will meet at the "Eurasian Railways Symposium" in Helsinki, Finland on 3 - 4 April, 2002. The symposium, entitled "The Eurasian Dimension: The Role of Railways in Northern European - Northeast Asian Relations", is organized by The Finland - Northeast Asia Trade Association in cooperation with VR/The Finnish National Railways. Invitations have also been extended to officials and experts from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The purpose of the track-two symposium is to study northern European railway links with Northeast Asia and prospects for their development. The Chairman of the symposium is Mr. Markku Heiskanen, Chairman of The Finland - Northeast Asia Trade Association. For further information, please visit the website of the Finland - Northeast Asia Trade Association: http://www.geocities.com/kaky_ry

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.
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