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I. United States

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1. Four-Party Peace Talks

Reuters (Elif Kaban, "NEW KOREA TALKS RECESS AFTER SEATING DISPUTE," Geneva, 03/16/98) and the AP-Dow Jones News Service ("KOREAN PEACE TALKS IN GENEVA STALL OVER SEATING ARRANGEMENTS," Geneva, 03/16/98) reported that the latest round of Korean peninsula peace talks were held up for over five hours on Monday by a dispute over seating arrangements. PRC assistant foreign affairs minister Chen Jian announced later, "The seating arrangement has been resolved. We have all been seated." He added that more informal consultations are set for Tuesday morning and formal talks will resume Tuesday afternoon, lasting for at least three more days. Chen

said that all four parties had agreed to the general agenda of replacing the 1953 armistice with a permanent peace pact, and that under that broad agenda "all concerns can be raised and discussed." He added, "The discussions should proceed from easy ones to difficult ones and lastly reach agreement. There is broad agreement that a kind of mechanism should be set up in order to enter into substantive discussions." DPRK deputy delegation chief Li Gun, who is also DPRK ambassador to the UN, said Sunday, "To us, the issue of American troop withdrawal is one of the major subjects at the negotiations. We will repeat our demand in Geneva." Li also alleged that ROK moves to boost forces near the Demilitarized Zone were "keeping us alert." In Washington, State Department spokesman James P. Rubin stated, "We hope to move the process forward through these discussions, but our expectations are not high for breakthroughs in what will be a slow and painstaking effort." Meanwhile, in Seoul, ROK President Kim Dae-jung reiterated Monday that the US military presence was vital to peace in the region.

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2. DPRK Military Exercises

The Wall Street Journal (Michael Schuman, "NORTH KOREAN WAR EXERCISES PRECEDE HOPEFUL PEACE TALKS," Seoul, 03/16/98) reported that many analysts have speculated that the DPRK's announcement of large-scale war games could be an attempt by the DPRK to demonstrate its military strength ahead of the four-party peace talks. The report quoted Daryl Plunk of the Heritage Foundation as saying that the exercises "may be a shot across the bow of the new South Korean government ahead of the talks."

State Department Spokesman James Rubin ("STATE DEPT. NOON BRIEFING," USIA Transcript, 03/13/98) downplayed the significance of the DPRK's announcement of large-scale military exercises on Friday. Rubin stated, "this is, as far as I can tell from the experts, a sort of an annual ritual in this area." He added, however, that the US "will be monitoring the situation closely, and comparing this exercise to previous such activities." He said that Defense Department estimates suggest that the level of operations are lower and that the training level is down from previous winter exercises. Regarding limits on foreigners' travel, Rubin stated, "it's not unusual, unfortunately, in North Korea that there are limitations put on travel inside North Korea. But the North Korean authorities have told us that they will continue to permit visits by foreigners to local areas related to food assistance during the period of this exercise."

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3. Aid for DPRK

The Associated Press ("REPORT: SEOUL MAY AID N. KOREA," Seoul, 03/15/98) reported that the ROK's Yonhap news agency on Sunday quoted unidentified sources as saying that the ROK government will convene a Cabinet meeting this week to approve the donation of 200,000 tons of fertilizer to the DPRK. The issue is expected to be taken up when Red Cross officials of the two Koreas meet in Beijing next week to discuss the latest ROK offer to provide 50,000 tons of food aid to the DPRK. Meanwhile, the ROK's Korea Sharing Movement shipped 800 tons of fertilizer worth US$190,000 to the DPRK last week.

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4. DPRK Diplomacy

The Associated Press ("N.KOREA CUTS DIPLOMATIC OPERATIONS," Seoul, 03/14/98) reported that

the DPRK announced Saturday that it will cut by one-third the number of overseas diplomatic operations until the food shortage and other economic conditions improve. The Korean Central News Agency quoted a spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry as saying, "To cope with the acute situation, we have decided to reduce and readjust missions abroad some by 30 percent until the food and economic problems are solved." He stated that years of disastrous weather "have brought grave damage to the agricultural and all other economic sectors, rendering the food problem and the country's economic situation very difficult."

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5. ROK Political Prisoners

The Associated Press (Kyong-Hwa Seok, "MORE SOUTH KOREAN AMNESTY URGED," Seoul, 03/16/98) reported that Chung Dong-young, spokesman for the National Congress for New Politics, said Monday that the party will ask the government to free more political prisoners on May 3, Buddha's birthday. Chung stated, "Our party members agreed that we need a more generous standard for amnesty, considering the new president is the first opposition leader to take power in 50 years." Meanwhile, human rights activist Jin Kwan a Buddhist monk, stated, "The number of political prisoners released this time is only 15 percent of the total 478 political prisoners. We cannot understand why the rest are not freed." Jin was sentenced to 3 1/2 years in 1996 for giving information on political prisoners in the ROK to a Korean-Canadian man, who authorities said was a DPRK spy.

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6. ROK Financial Crisis

Reuters ("S. KOREA EXTENDS DEBT ROLLOVER DEADLINE," Seoul, 03/14/98) reported that ROK media said Saturday that nearly all of the ROK's short-term debt will be rolled over into longer-term obligations under a deal with global creditors. An unnamed finance ministry official said that foreign bankers and the ROK would hold a signing ceremony for the roll-over this month.

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7. US Ambassador to ROK

The New York Times (Nicholas D. Kristof, "KOREA DEFLATED, BUT A DIPLOMAT'S HOPES ARE HIGH," Seoul, 03/16/98) carried an article profiling US Ambassador to the ROK Stephen Bosworth. Bosworth was quoted as saying, "Because of the nature of the relationship, you have the opportunity to have an influence that is not often true elsewhere. This is one of the three or four embassies in the world where you really have an opportunity to make a difference." The article pointed out that Bosworth, as the former head of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, is the first US ambassador to the ROK with experience visiting and dealing with the DPRK. Former US ambassador to the ROK Donald Gregg stated, "The fact that he's been to North Korea, that he's dealt with the North Koreans, gives him a whole new dimension which is going to stand him in good stead." You Jong-keun, economic adviser to ROK President Kim Dae-jung, said that Bosworth's background as a former economics officer "is a great plus" at a time when the ROK is facing a financial crisis. You added, "He's very well respected." The article said that some US government officials felt that, before Bosworth's appointment, the US embassy was doing an inadequate job of reporting on economic developments in the ROK. Bosworth was quoted as saying, "I think it's a justifiable criticism, though I don't know quite what you do about it, that the State Department does not have enough first- rate economic talent."

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8. PRC Military Development

Agence France-Presse ("HIGH-TECH ARMS STRESSED FOR CHINA'S ARMY," Beijing, 03/16/98) reported that Fu Quanyou, chief of the PRC army's general staff, said in the official magazine Seeking Truth on Monday that the PRC must develop its own high-tech weapons to replace out-o--date technology. Fu stated, "Future wars will be fought with technology in weapons and command." He praised the Government's recent plan to cut the number of troops by 500,000 while increasing spending to upgrade technology and weapons, but warned that the plan still faced opposition in the military from those with "old concepts" who are "hindering the reforms."

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9. US-PRC Nuclear Cooperation

State Department Spokesman James Rubin ("STATE DEPT. NOON BRIEFING," USIA Transcript, 03/13/98) said that recent US-PRC discussions on PRC nuclear shipments to Iran demonstrate the effectiveness of US non-proliferation methods. Rubin stated, "We raised with Chinese authorities a possible - and let me emphasize the word 'possible' -- transaction between a Chinese entity and an Iranian organization involving a chemical that is not on any international nuclear control list, but could be used in the processing of nuclear materials. The Chinese authorities investigated the matter and promptly informed us that a transaction like that had not been agreed to, and that China had no intention of making such a transaction; nor do we have any evidence that a shipment of the chemical occurred, or that such a transaction is proceeding." He added that the US believes that there has been a "sea change" in PRC policies and practices on non-proliferation. He stated that the US does not "have an indication that the transaction would have gone forward if we hadn't contacted the Chinese." He added that the chemical in question, anhydrous hydrogen fluoride (AHF), "is not used to enrich uranium to weapons grade. AHF is used in the conversion process, which takes uranium from its basic form to a gaseous form suitable for beginning an entirely new process called uranium enrichment.... In addition, AHF has other uses."

II. Republic of Korea

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1. Four-party Peace Talks

Delegates of the two Koreas, the US, and the PRC held a preparatory meeting for the four-party peace talks on March 14. No official statement was issued at the end of the session, which lasted approximately four hours. Diplomats said the meeting laid the groundwork for the full plenary session to be chaired by the PRC. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Stanley Roth will head the US delegation during the full session of the talks. PRC assistant foreign minister Chen Jian, deputy foreign minister Kim Kye-gwan of the DPRK, and deputy foreign minister Song Young-shik of the ROK will also represent their corresponding delegation. (Korea Times, "PREPARATORY SESSION OF KOREA PEACE TALKS HELD IN GENEVA," 03/16/98)

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2. DPRK Diplomacy

A spokesman for the DPRK foreign ministry announced on March 14 that over 30 percent of the

DPRK's diplomatic missions are to be closed down. The official, during an interview with the DPRK's Central News Agency, emphasized the economic difficulties that the DPRK has been experiencing over the past few years as the main reason for the closures. (Hankyoreh Shinmun, "DPRK TO CLOSE DOWN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS," 03/15/98)

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3. US-DPRK Missile Talks

The US and the DPRK will resume their missile-talks in the near future as agreed during their March 13 meeting, sources reported on March 14. Accordingly, the two parties will be able to continue their negotiations over the suspension of the DPRK's missile development programs, although specific dates have not been agreed upon. Furthermore, the US was urged to ease its economic embargo against the DPRK. However, the US responded to the DPRK's request by saying that such a decision can only be made when various conditions such as supportive US domestic law, approval by the Congress, and ease of inter-Korean tension are accomplished. (Chosun Ilbo, Kim Kwang-il, "US-DPRK TO RESUME MISSILE TALKS," Geneva, 03/15/98)

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4. Russia-Japan Naval Exercise

Russia has proposed to the Japanese marine force that Japan, Russia, and the US stage joint search and rescue drills in the East Sea (Sea of Japan), according to the Sankei Shimbun on March 15. Russia made the proposal when Masahiro Akiyama, deputy head of the Japanese defense agency, visited Russia in late January, the newspaper quoted military sources as saying. Accordingly, Japanese and Russian naval forces reportedly plan to stage joint drills in the East Sea in 1998, the first full-scale joint exercises between the defense forces. Russia wants to expand the drills to incorporate the US in a confidence-building exercise, the paper said. (Korea Times, "RUSSIA PROPOSES JOINT NAVAL RESCUE DRILLS WITH JAPAN, US," 03/16/98)

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.

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