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I. United States

1. DPRK Plutonium Reprocessing?

The Associated Press (Jae-Suk Yoo, "NORTH KOREA SAYS IT'S EXTRACTING PLUTONIUM," Seoul, 04/18/03), Reuters ("US CALLS NORTH KOREA REPROCESSING STATEMENT AMBIGUOUS," Washington, 04/18/03), Reuters (Paul Eckert and Arshad Mohammed, "NORTH KOREA SAYS ITS REPROCESSING FUEL RODS, US UNSURE" Seoul/Washington, 04/18/03) and the New York Times (Howard W. French, "NORTH KOREA SAYS IT IS EXTRACTING PLUTONIUM FROM FUEL RODS," Seoul, 04/18/03), reported that the DPRK on Friday it had begun reprocessing spent nuclear fuel rods that can be used to make atomic bombs but U.S. officials suggested that the DPRK statement may have been mistranslated. Pyongyang's statement said, "As we have already declared, we are

successfully reprocessing more than 8,000 spent fuel rods at the final phase, as we sent interim information to the U.S. and other countries concerned early in March after resuming our nuclear activities from December last year." A new translation produced by the U.S. government's Foreign Broadcast Information Service from a Korean-language report on Pyongyang's Korean Central Broadcasting Station suggested that the DPRK was on the verge of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel rods rather than having had already done so. According to this version, which was released by the State Department, US analysts rendered the statement as: "We are successfully completing the final phase to the point of the reprocessing operation for some 8,000 spent fuel rods." "Our experts looked at the Korean version and said, this is a better way to translate this," said a U.S. official who did not wish to be identified. This development raises the stakes in the North's upcoming talks with the US over Pyongyang's suspected nuclear weapons programs. Those talks could begin in Beijing as soon as next week. In Washington, a State Department official said the US is not aware of any information indicating that reprocessing has begun. He declined to elaborate but the comment suggested that US satellite observations of the DPRK's main nuclear facility did not indicate any new activity. The official, asking not to be identified, said he was not aware of any change in the plan to go ahead with the talks in Beijing. Another official, also speaking privately, said the statement may be "typical DPRK bluster" in advance of the discussions. "There is no doubt that this Foreign Ministry statement throws the holding of the talks in doubt," the official said. The DPRK spokesman emphasized the importance that the DPRK sees in a military deterrent to stave off a possible US attack in the wake of the war against Iraq. "The Iraqi war teaches a lesson that in order to prevent a war and defend the security of a country and the sovereignty of a nation it is necessary to have a powerful physical deterrent force only," the unnamed spokesman told North Korea's KCNA news agency.

2. US on DPRK Reprocessing and DPRK Multilateral Talks Reuters ("US TO CONSULT WITH ALLIES ON NORTH KOREA," Crawford, Texas, 04/18/03) and Reuters (Arshad Mohammed, "US SENDS MIXED SIGNALS ON ATTENDING NORTH KOREA TALKS," Washington, 04/18/03) reported that US officials said on Friday they had no indication that the DPRK had begun reprocessing its spent fuel rods but sent conflicting signals on whether they will attend talks expected in Beijing next week on ending the DPRK's suspected nuclear weapons program. A senior Bush administration official said the US was weighing canceling the talks between the US, the PRC and the DPRK after the DPRK said it had begun reprocessing, a step that could allow it to produce six to eight atomic weapons. But other US officials said that for now there was no change in their plans to attend the three-way talks. "Whether the talks go forward, that's not decided. There is active consideration to canceling them," said the senior Bush administration official, who spoke on condition that he not be identified. "It is an accurate statement as of the moment to say we don't know of any reprocessing but it's possible that it's begun and we just haven't determined it yet." But other US officials suggested the talks would go forward as Washington studied a statement by a DPRK foreign ministry official that the DPRK was "successfully reprocessing" more than 8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods. "At this point in time there is no change in plans," said one administration official who asked not to be named. Asked if the US would attend the Beijing talks, a second official added: "I don't see anything to indicate otherwise."

3. ROK on DPRK Reprocessing

Reuters ("SOUTH KOREA SAYS NO SIGN OF NORTH FUEL REPROCESSING," Seoul, 04/18/03) reported that the ROK said it had seen no sign the DPRK was reprocessing nuclear fuel rods as the DPRK stated on Friday just days before key talks on the Korean nuclear crisis. "According to our intelligence, there is no sign that North Korea has begun reprocessing fuel rods," Lee Jihyun, presidential spokeswoman for the foreign media, told Reuters by telephone. "We did not receive any

official information from North Korea in March," Lee added, referring to a DPRK Foreign Ministry statement that said it had told concerned countries last month it had begun reprocessing 8,000 fuel rods.

4. PRC on DPRK Multilateral Talks

The Associated Press (Jae-Suk Yoo, "CHINA: NUKE DISPUTE BETWEEN US, NORTH KOREA," Seoul, 04/18/03) reported that the PRC's ambassador in Seoul said that the DPRK and the US should resolve their nuclear dispute themselves, and that the PRC doesn't plan to mediate between them during talks. Ambassador Li Bin's remarks aired on the ROK's MBC Radio Friday came as US, DPRK and PRC officials plan to meet in Beijing as early as next week to try to end the dispute over the DPRK's alleged nuclear weapons programs. "I don't think China plans to mediate," Li told MBC in an interview recorded Thursday. "Although China can play a constructive role, it is the two parties concerned that should resolve the problem. How much the problem could be resolved is up to how the two parties work." US and ROK officials have said that the PRC will be a full participant in the forthcoming talks. But the PRC's role in the talks remained unclear.

5. DPRK-US-PRC Multilateral Talks

The Washington File, "EXCERPT: US, NORTH KOREA, CHINA TALKS NEXT WEEK A FIRST STEP," Washington, 04/18/03) reported that three-way talks tentatively scheduled for next week between the PRC, the DPRK, and the US are a "first step" towards resolving the issue of the DPRK's nuclear program on a multilateral basis, according to Philip Reeker, deputy spokesman at the State Department. "We don't anticipate immediate breakthroughs, but we're looking for progress," Reeker told reporters April 16 at the State Department's daily briefing. "China and the US both agree and both are firmly of the policy that the Korean Peninsula must be free of nuclear arms, as do all of North Korea's neighbors," said the deputy spokesman. "We certainly all agree that we'd continue to press for Japanese and ROK early inclusion in the talks," Reeker said, "That would be one of our priorities."

For excerpt from the transcript of the State Department April 16 briefing, visit: http://usinfo.state.gov/cgi-bin/washfile/display.pl?p=/products/washfile/geog/ea&f=03041701.eea&t=/products/washfile/newsitem.shtml

6. Japan Response on Rumsfeld DPRK Aid Comment

The Japan Times (Junko Takahashi, "RUMSFELD BARB ON PYONGYANG AID EARNS ANGRY REBUKE FROM FUKUDA," 04/18/03) reported that Japan Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda voiced displeasure Friday over a suggestion by US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that money and goods sent by Japan, the ROK, and the PRC are helping to sustain the DPRK's dictatorship. Asked to comment on Rumsfeld's remarks, made during a meeting with Pentagon employees Thursday in Washington, Fukuda said Japan has not been dispatching money and goods to Pyongyang in a proactive manner. "I would not say it's zero, but it's not that we have been actively doing it," Fukuda said. He was apparently alluding to cash and goods that are sent by pro-Pyongyang Korean residents of Japan when they travel to the DPRK on a ship that calls between Japanese and DPRK ports. "There is a humanitarian side, and speaking of humanitarian assistance, the United States is doing it too," Fukuda said. The US has recently pledged to provide food aid to North Korea, while Japan has provided no aid of any sort since 2000. "I would hope that he speaks after looking at the whole picture and at who he is speaking of," Fukuda said.

7. Japan SDF in Iraq

The Japan Times (Kanako Takahara, "JUNE EYED FOR SDF-IRAQ BILL," 04/18/03) reported that extension of Diet session needed to ensure passage Legislation that would allow the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces to Iraq for postwar reconstruction will probably be submitted to the Diet in June, a senior member of the ruling coalition said Friday. The senior coalition official also said the current Diet session, scheduled to run until June 18, will be extended to ensure passage of the legislation. Even if the Iraq legislation were to be submitted earlier, the Diet will still be busy focusing on a package of bills related to personal information protection and emergency contingency legislation, according to the official, who asked not to be named. Because of the tight schedule, Cabinet ministers and senior government officials would not be able to take part in additional sessions, the official explained. To accelerate deliberations, however, the Iraq legislation will be handled by a special committee rather than a standing committee so sessions can be held daily, he said.

8. PRC SARS Death Toll

The New York Times (Erik Eckholm, "CHINA CAUTIONS OFFICIALS NOT TO HIDE SARS CASES," Beijing, 04/18/03), Reuters (Jonathan Ansfield, "CHINA VOWS TRANSPARENT WAR ON SARS VIRUS," Beijing, 04/18/03) and BBC News ("CHINA TO RAISE SARS DEATH TOLL," 04/18/03) reported that the PRC is likely to increase its figures for the number of SARS cases in Beijing, according to a World Health Organization official. James Maguire, a member of the WHO team investigating the SARS outbreak in the PRC stated that PRC authorities had agreed to alter the way they define patients with SARS symptoms. "Their expectation is that the number will be significantly greater than what is officially reported," he said. The PRC has been repeatedly criticized by the health body for withholding information about the SARS virus, which began in Guangdong province in November and has since spread around the world, killing more than 160 people and infecting 3,000 others. Earlier this week, the WHO estimated that there were up to 200 cases in the Beijing area, compared with the government's figure of 37.

9. Hong Kong on SARS Crisis

Agence France-Presse ("HONG KONG LEADER ADMITS SARS A 'DISASTER' AS DEATH TOLL CLIMBS TO 69," Hong Kong, 04/18/03) reported that Chief executive Tung Chee-hwa admitted the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) has been disastrous for Hong Kong as four more deaths were reported in the hard-hit city. The death toll in the city has now risen to 69, with 37 of those victims succumbing in the past seven days alone. The latest deaths included a 63-year-old female and two males, aged 73 and 67, all with a history of chronic disease. The other fatality involved a 42-year-old male who had no history of illness. The authorities do not include in their figures an American national who was pronounced dead on arrival at a Hong Kong hospital last week after being transferred from the PRC. Thirty new cases of the disease were also reported taking the total to 1,327. Fifty patients were discharged from hospital bringing the total number of people who have recovered to 322, while 112 patients remain in intensive care. Tung earlier told reporters the SARS outbreak had been a "disaster" and admitted for the first time that the government had been slow to react to the city's worst outbreak at a housing complex last month. "No matter which way you look at it, it is a disaster," said a stone-faced Tung.

10. Japan on Japan Cluster Bombs

CNN News ("JAPAN DEFENDS CLUSTER BOMBS," Tokyo, 04/18/03)

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba has defended Japan's stockpiling of cluster bombs which can harm civilians and said its military, whose reach is limited by a pacifist constitution, would never use them overseas. "We will use them (cluster bombs) only when enemies invade our country," Ishiba told parliament. "Our county has no intention of using them in other countries and killing people inhumanely," he added. Japan's postwar constitution renounces war as a means of settling international disputes and prohibits the maintenance of air, sea and land forces, a ban the government has long interpreted to mean the nation can maintain military forces only for self-defense. The Defense Ministry said it had acquired several thousand of the controversial cluster bombs over the past 16 years and deployed them at air force bases around Japan. Cluster bombs have been used by US forces in the war in Iraq, and were used in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Human rights groups say they should be banned and that they pose a particular danger to inquisitive children. Each of the bombs contains around two hundred smaller "bomblets" that can penetrate armor or kill anyone who steps on them. Some of the bomblets fail to explode on impact, thus posing a danger to civilians similar to that caused by landmines, even long after hostilities have ended. Japan finished disposing of its stockpile of landmines in February in line with an international convention. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda denied on Thursday that the government had concealed its possession of cluster bombs and said he believed Japan's military, which is comparable in size and budget to that of Britain, should keep them. "They are an essential part of our defense policy and I can see no need to dispose of them," he told reporters on Thursday. Domestic newspapers noted that the Defense Ministry had not issued specific budget requests for the bombs, but had included them under the general heading of "ammunition." The government spent 14.8 billion yen ($123.7 million) on the bombs between 1987 and 2002, the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper said.

II. Japan

1. Yasukuni Shrine Issue

The Asahi Shinbun("TOUR AIMS TO CHANGE YASUKUNI'S CHANGE," 04/17/03) reported that The event, intended to shake off the shrine's notoriety, is open only to foreign media. Members of the foreign media are being invited to join a press tour of Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine in a bid to rid the controversial Shinto complex of its negative image. The tour, scheduled for Tuesday, is being organized by United Shinto Shrines Association, which oversees Yasukuni Shrine. But its notoriety stems from not distinguishing between soldiers who died on the battlefield and Class-A war criminals later executed. Government visits to Yasukuni incense Japan's neighbors. "You can see the headlines in newspapers that read, 'Was it an official or private visit?' each time a prime minister visits the shrine," said an association official. "Debate is even under way as to whether to construct a secular war memorial." To transform the shrine's image, association officials hit on the idea of conducting a press tour for foreign media, complete with speeches on the shrine's history and significance from professors specializing in Shintoism. "The majority of foreign media correspondents misunderstand Yasukuni Shrine, describing it as something like a `war shrine' that stokes militaristic sentiments. We hope to change these misunderstandings with this tour," said a public relations official from the association. The tour invitation, sent to dozens of members of the foreign media in Japan, was labeled "Urgent." It said the association hoped reporters would learn all they wanted to know about Yasukuni Shrine. Officials said they have received a positive response. The tour was scheduled to coincide with the Spring Great Festival-one of two Annual Great Festivals hosted by Yasukuni Shrine each year.

2. Japan-DPRK Relations

The Asahi Shinbun ("ABE TO ABDUCTEES: BRACE YOURSELVES FOR LONG NORTH KOREA TALKS,"04/17/03) reported that the Asahi Shimbun interviewed Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe, Tokyo's point man on the abduction issue, on his views on the negotiations and other issues concerning DPRK in the wake of the Iraq war. In the interview, Abe responded to the question on his thoughts about the request by families of abductees to impose economic sanctions on DPRK if no negotiation progress is made, saying that it is only natural for the families to seek such an option as a way of producing results, but Japan's government is not yet ready to implement such sanctions and the negotiation is enough to discuss with DPRK on the abductees issue. He added on the legislative means to implement economic sanctions, "I considered such legislation with my Diet colleagues before becoming deputy chief Cabinet secretary. However, there is a huge difference between having such an option and actually implementing it." Mr. Abe clarified his position that the talks on diplomatic normalization with DPRK would not make fruit before the abductees issue is solved.

3. Japan-PRC Relations

The Asahi Shinbun (Keiichi Kaneko and Kentaro Kurihara, "KAN MAKES POLITICAL MILEAGE IN CHINA,"Beijing, 04/18/03) reported that the Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) leader's meeting Wednesday with Hu showed the party is keen to forge ahead with its own foreign policy efforts. Kan discussed Japan-PRC relations and international concerns about DPRK's nuclear program-issues that rightfully are in the domain of Junichiro Koizumi, except the prime minister's hands are bound by controversy of his own making: his repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine. The Beijing leadership was so angered by Koizumi's actions that it suspended exchanges of top government leaders. By giving a red-carpet welcome to the leader of Japan's No. 1 opposition party, PRC apparently intended to "send a message to Koizumi, that it would keep its distance," said a Communist Party source here. Hu, his face creased with a beaming smile, greeted Kan by saying he wanted to maintain "stable PRC-Japan relations." In response, Kan stressed the need for bilateral cooperation in an envisioned economic integration of Asia and resolution of the DPRK crisis. Kan has recently said he will not seek a "dichotomy of either following the US or remaining anti-American, but a third way somewhere in between," suggesting a departure from traditional opposition party diplomacy. This was evident by the way Kan explained his stance on a proposed framework involving the US, PRC and DPRK to resolve outstanding problems with Pyongyang. He said Japan's position is for Japan, ROK and RF to join the negotiations. Wang Jiarui, head of the Communist Party's International Liaison Department, also welcomed Kan to PRC. Wang said the PRC leadership anticipated further exchanges with what he called "an important political force in Japan." Behind these warm words lies a degree of cool-headedness, however. During Kan's visit, officials also arranged for him to meet with Zhou Mingwei, deputy director of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council. This, analysts said, seemed to be PRC's way of issuing a veiled warning to Kan about its Taiwan policy. Beijing is uneasy about Kan's stance on Taiwan and human rights issues, according to a PRC party source. In November, Kan visited Taiwan and met President Chen Shui-bian and his predecessor, Lee Tenghui. PRC, according to the party source, does not expect Minshuto to be a leading force in Japanese politics. "Its successful merger with the Liberal Party seems unlikely and it will not be able to take over the ruling Liberal Democratic Party," the source said. Even so, Beijing still gave a warm welcome to Kan because his stand on the US-led campaign in Iraq and the Yasukuni issue is close to PRC's. By meeting Kan, Hu effectively demonstrated PRC's distance to Koizumi, according to the source.

4. Japan's Possession of Cluster Bombs

The Asahi Shinbun (DEFENSE ARSENAL INCLUDES CONTROVERSIAL CLUSTER BOBMS,

04/18/03) reported that while Japan has recently gotten rid of its land mines, the Air Self-Defense Force still maintains a large stockpile of cluster bombs, munitions that human rights groups criticize as dangerous to civilians, it was learned Thursday. Although the number of bombs is not known-it is believed to run into thousands-the price tag for the munitions purchased between fiscal 1987 and 2002 was 14.8 billion yen. The ASDF in its budget requests presented to the Diet did not specifically mention cluster bombs. The bombs have been deployed to bases nationwide, but the Diet has not held debate on the purchases. The Defense Agency denies it tried to hide its procurement of the controversial weapon. "We do not describe ammunition breakdowns in detail in our budget requests because of the great variety of ammunition and because of limited document space," an agency official said. "We have put the bombs on display at base air shows and have no intention whatsoever of concealing (them)." Cluster bombs, which the US military dropped in the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, in Afghanistan and most recently, in Iraq, are made up of dispensers with submunitions-also called bomblets-inside. When a cluster bomb is dropped, more than 200 bomblets are scattered over a wide area. Unexploded bomblets often function like land mines, killing or injuring civilians who touch them even long after hostilities have finished. The International Committee of the Red Cross and other groups have called for strict control of cluster bombs. The cluster bombs the ASDF possess are of the CBU-87/B class, produced in Japan under a U.S. license. The exact number has not been disclosed but they are believed to total several thousand. The bombs can be carried by ASDF fighters and fighter support aircraft. No drills using the bombs have been conducted. The agency said the bombs were designed to "destroy invading enemy vehicles fanned out over large areas that ordinary bombs cannot deal with."

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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