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I. United States

1. DPRK Multilateral Talks

The Associated Press (Christopher Torchia, "DISPUTE IMPERILS NORTH KOREA NUKE TALKS," Seoul, 02/18/04) reported that the dispute between the DPRK and the US over the DPRK's nuclear capabilities is threatening to derail chances of a peaceful resolution at six-nation talks next week. US Undersecretary of State John Bolton, meeting with Japanese officials in Tokyo, warned Wednesday that the DPRK's denial it has a nuclear program based on uranium could hurt efforts to resolve the crisis. "I think North Korea's unwillingness to discuss the uranium enrichment program could subvert President Bush's determination for a peaceful, diplomatic resolution of the DPRK issue,"

Bolton said in an interview with Japanese public broadcaster NHK. The questions about the DPRK's nuclear capabilities are expected to overshadow the six-party talks in Beijing that begin next Wednesday. At issue is whether the DPRK has only a plutonium-based nuclear program, as it claims, or whether the DPRK also has a uranium-based program, as the US maintains. There's also uncertainty about whether the DPRK has made nuclear weapons and whether they can mount them on a missile and fire them. The plutonium program is believed to be more of an immediate threat than the alleged uranium one, which does not require large-scale, easily detectable facilities and could require at least several years of operation before it can produce a bomb. The recent confession of Abdul Qadeer Khan, Pakistan's proliferator of nuclear secrets, suggests the DPRK's uranium program "is of longer duration and more advanced than we had assessed," US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly said last week in Washington. The DPRK denies receiving nuclear secrets from Pakistan. "There is no agreed estimate of anything," said Leon Sigal, a DPRK expert. "As with Iraq, there is significant disagreement in the intelligence community about pieces of this." "Unless the US introduces a high-level defector with certain knowledge of the DPRK (uranium program) locations, or can send the IAEA or other inspectors to the right place, US intelligence credibility will not be reinforced," said Larry Wortzel, a former US military attache in Beijing and now an analyst at the Heritage Foundation in Washington.

2. ROK Three-Step DPRK Nuclear Freeze Framework

JoongAng Ilbo (Oh Young-hwan, "SEOUL OFFERS AID TO NORTH FOR NUCLEAR FREEZE," 02/17/04) reported that in exchange for a verifiable freeze of the DPRK's nuclear program, the ROK government is prepared to provide energy aid and, gradually, security assurances to the DPRK, a senior government official said yesterday. The official stressed that the freeze must ultimately lead to the dismantling of the DPRK's effort to build nuclear arms. Under the plan, the ROK government intends to propose a modified three-step process to resolve the nuclear standoff at the upcoming six-party talks in Beijing on February 25. The ROK has consulted with the US, Japan, Russia and the PRC, and they are said to have responded positively to the new overture. The ROK official who did not wish to be identified said yesterday that "the government intends to maintain the three-step framework that we proposed at the first round of talks in August, and we have detailed our response to the North's proposal for compensation for freezing nuclear activities." He added, "If the nuclear freeze that North Korea mentions ultimately leads to nuclear dismantlement, then we will possibly provide energy aid." As to what constitutes energy aid, the official said the government would consider providing coal or crude oil rather than electricity.

The ROK's three-step proposal

First: The six nations express their willingness to resolve the nuclear crisis.

Second: In return for North Korea's promise to dismantle its nuclear arms programs, the parties will undertake several measures:

* In return for a freeze of the North's nuclear programs, the South offers energy aid. * North Korea express its intention to dismantle the nuclear programs; the other parties promise security assurances. * North Korea completes dismantling, and other parties will provide written security assurances.

Third: The parties improve relations overall.

3. US on Japan-DPRK Abduction Issue

Kyodo ("US AIDE BACKS JAPAN STANCE ON ABDUCTIONS," New York, 02/18/04) reported that US Undersecretary of State John Bolton expressed full support Wednesday for Japan's position to raise the issue of citizens abducted by the DPRK at the upcoming six-way talks on Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions, the Kyodo news agency reported, citing Japanese trade minister Shoichi Nakagawa. Nakagawa told reporters that Bolton, who is in charge of arms control and international security, told him during a meeting earlier in the day that the US has serious concerns about the abduction issue. Nakagawa, minister of economy, trade and industry, conveyed Japan's appreciation for the US's backing and called for its continued support, Kyodo reported. He headed a group of Japanese lawmakers addressing the abduction issue until he assumed the current cabinet post last September.

4. Japan DPRK Sanctions Bill Delay

Kyodo ("JAPAN SHELVES SHIP BAN BILL UNTIL AFTER NUKE TALKS," Tokyo, 02/18/04) Dow Jones) reported that Japan's ruling coalition on Wednesday decided to shelve steps to proceed with a bill to ban the entry of DPRK ships into Japanese ports until six-nation talks on the DPRK nuclear issue end next week, coalition officials said. Political circles believe it is better to wait and see how the DPRK responds at the talks which will start February 25 in Beijing before stepping up pressure on it, the officials said. The policy was endorsed by the secretaries general of the Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner, the New Komeito party, and other senior party officials in a meeting, they said. LDP panels on Tuesday endorsed an outline of the bill, which could be applied to the DPRK ferry Mangyongbong-92, the only ferry service linking between Japan and the DPRK. A ban of the ship's entry into Japanese ports would deal a blow to the DPRK as it is believed to carry cash from Japan, as well as cargo and passengers between the two countries, according to Japanese government officials.

5. DPRK on ROK Iraq Troop Dispatch

Agence France-Presse ("NORTH KOREA SLAMS ROK TROOP DISPATCH TO IRAQ," 02/18/04) reported that the DPRK blasted the ROK's decision to send troops to Iraq, describing the deployment as a "shameful" act of bowing to US pressure. The DPRK's broadside came after the ROK's parliament voted last week for the dispatch of more than 3,000 troops to Iraq at Washington's request, ending five months of debate. The ROK contingent will be the third largest in the war-torn state after the US and Britain. "This is a rash act to be always cursed by history and the generations to come," Rodong Sinmun, a DPRK newspaper, said in a commentary. The troop dispatch proved "ROK authorities are nothing but puppets unhesitatingly allowing the US to infringe upon the sovereignty and dignity of the Korean nation and even the interests and destiny of the ROK people yielding to the US high-handed pressure," it said. "It is as clear as noonday what a fate thousands of young South Koreans will face while serving as bullet-shields for the US."

6. Inter-Korean Relations

Korea Herald ("JOINT INTER-KOREA EVENT CANCELED," 02/19/04) reported that the DPRK has canceled what was to be the first civilian inter-Korean event of the year, ROK organizers said yesterday. The DPRK's National Reconciliation Council did not mention plans for the March 1 event in the message it sent Friday, meaning it did not intend to mark the date in a joint manner, according to organizers. Last year, civilian representatives of the two sides jointly commemorated the day in 1919 when Koreans declared independence from Japanese colonial rule and began protests nationwide.

7. Russian Second Missile Launch Failure

The Associated Press (Vladimir Isachenkov, "RUSSIAN MISSILE FAILS TO LAUNCH AGAIN," Moscow, 02/18/04) reported that a Russian ballistic missile self-destructed moments after taking off from a submarine Wednesday, the second failed test launch in two days of maneuvers meant to display the country's military might. President Vladimir Putin didn't mention the failure, but said Russia would soon get new strategic weapons that would protect the country for years to come. He also said the Moscow might develop a missile defense system. Putin didn't offer specifics about the new weapons - presumably a new generation of missiles - but said they will be "capable of hitting targets continents away with hypersonic speed, high precision and the ability of wide maneuver." The massive exercises have been described as the largest in more than 20 years, and come less than a month before a presidential election Putin is expected to win. The missile launched from the Karelia submarine on Wednesday veered from its flight path less than two minutes after take-off, triggering its self-destruct system, Russian Navy spokesman Capt. Igor Dygalo told The Associated Press. No one was hurt, he said in a telephone interview. That came a day after a missile failed to launch from the Novomoskovsk submarine. Russian officials and media had conflicting statements about the reason for the failure.

8. Japan Missile-Detecting Radar Tests

Reuters ("JAPAN TO START TESTS OF MISSILE-DETECTING RADAR," Tokyo, 02/18/04) reported that Japan will start testing from April a land-based defense radar system capable of detecting ballistic missiles as well as aircraft, a Defense Ministry official said on Wednesday. The new radar will be able to home in on a ballistic missile and follow its flight, the first land-based radar with this capability, the official said. Four Japanese destroyers are equipped with high-tech Aegis missile-detection systems, but Japan's land-based radar has previously focused on aircraft. Tests on the new system, developed since 1999 after the Taepodong launch, will start in April and last for around two years, the Yomiuri Shimbun daily said.

9. ROK Weapons Purchases

Donga Ilbo ("SOUTH KOREA TO PURCHASE ADDITIONAL WEAPONS WITH RELOCATION OF US FORCES IN KOREA," 02/18/04) reported that the ROK military may have to buy more weapons in order to defend the front line due to the relocation of the US forces stationed in Korea, Defense News reported in its February 17 issue. Because the 2nd US Infantry Division is planned to be relocated from north of Seoul to south of the Han River, the ROK military is urged to purchase radars that can detect the North's artillery attacks, helicopters that can carry out search and rescue work for 24 hours per day and additional artillery in order to respond to artillery attacks by the North, a ROK Defense official was quoted as saying in the weekly defense magazine. In addition, the US hopes the ROK appropriate a bigger defense budget in order to purchase the Ballistic Missile Defense System that would help the ROK cope with the DPRK's Scud missiles, and invest more into commanding and telecommunication systems, computers, intelligence, and reconnaissance. Apart from the ROK military's reinforcement, the US Defense Ministry plans to inject 11 billion dollars in an effort to modernize its military forces stationed in the ROK. The purchase list includes Stryker armored vehicles, the Patriot PAC-3 Missile System, and AH-64D Apache attack helicopters equipped with the advanced Longbow fire control radar.

10. ROK DMZ Eco-Tourism Plans

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREA SEEKS TO DEVELOP DMZ INTO ECOTOURIST ATTRACTION," 02/18/04) reported that efforts are underway to turn the Demilitarized Zone into a tourist attraction. Not only is the DMZ the world's most heavily fortified border that separates the two Koreas but it's also been the haven for endangered species like the white crane and the habitat of over 1,600 different kinds of plants and animals for decades. Waterfalls and natural reservoirs can also be found within the 248 kilometer long, four kilometer-wide zone. The idea is to turn the area into an ecotourism attraction, showing off the beauties of Mother Nature in and around an area where civilians have not been allowed to enter for over 50 years. The Korea National Tourism Organization and a team of ecologists at Seoul National University mapped out the basic guidelines of the envisioned project on Wednesday with a blueprint still underway. For now, the focus is on ensuring safe tours to the DMZ observatory as well as an underground tunnel that runs through the inter-Korean buffer zone. But KNTTO officials say details of the project will be finalized after making on-site inspections to areas including Cheolwon, Gangwon Province, the main site to be developed under the themes of ecology, sightseeing, war, and history. Officials added that comprehensive plans regarding the infrastructure including lodging and transportation services will be discussed with regional authorities while public hearings will also be held with local environmental groups. In addition, the tourism body also plans to conduct joint studies with the World Tourism Organization and North Korea on the feasibility of the project.

11. Koizumi Yasukuni Shrine Visit

Agence France-Presse ("KOIZUMI'S SHRINE VISITS DERAIL JAPANESE BID FOR CHINA RAIL PROJECT," 02/18/04) reported that Japan has been told it will lose a bid to build a high-speed rail link between Beijing and Shanghai because of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's repeated visits to a controversial war shrine, a report said. The PRC's resentment would probably also cost Tokyo success in another bid -- to host the multi-billion dollar ITER experimental nuclear fusion project -- because the PRC would back a rival French offer. The message was conveyed by a senior PRC official to Takenori Kanzaki, the head of the New Komei Party, Japan's junior ruling coalition partner, during a visit to Beijing earlier this month, the paper said. Japan would have won the lucrative contracts "if it had not been for the Yasukuni issue," Liu Hongcai, the deputy head of the communist party's international liaison department told Kanzaki, according to the Asahi's sources. Liu's reported reference was to Tokyo's Shinto Yasukuni Shrine, which is viewed as a symbol of Japan's militarism for honouring war dead including war criminals. Koizumi paid his respects at the shrine on New Year's Day, his fourth pilgrimage since he took office in April 2001, provoking PRC anger.

12. Taiwan 15 Billion Dollar Defense Budget

Agence France-Presse ("TAIWAN TO FINALIZE 15 BILLION DLR ARMS BUDGET BEFORE ELECTIONS," 02/18/04) reported that Taiwan is to push through a 500 billion Taiwan dollar (15.11 billion US dollar) defense budget for US-made weaponry before its March presidential elections, it was reported here. The island will buy eight conventional submarines, a dozen submarine-hunting aircraft P3C Orion and three Patriot anti-missile systems approved by US President George W. Bush in 2001, the China Times said. The paper quoted unnamed military officials as saying that the defense ministry had instructed the navy and army to speed up planning to finalize the budget two days before the March 20 polls. But the officials denied the move was politically motivated, saying the budgeting process had been underway since the arms package was approved three years ago, the paper said.

13. Japan Economic Recovery

The New York Times (Barney Jopson, "GROWTH FIGURES RAISE HOPE OF JAPANESE RECOVERY," 02/18/04) reported that in Tokyo The Japanese economy grew in the past quarter at its fastest rate since the 1980s asset bubble began to subside, raising hopes that the country is on the way to putting more than a decade of stagnation behind it. Japan's gross domestic product expanded at an annualised 7 per cent in the three months to December, with fresh data on Wednesday showing the recovery has broader foundations than export growth. The impressive rate of expansion surpassed US growth of 4 per cent in the same period, and prompted the Bank of Japan's deputy governor to say this year could mark a turning point in the battle against deflation, which has dogged the economy since the late 1990s. In the past six months, positive economic figures have helped build confidence in the possibility of a sustainable recovery. Corporate bankruptcies fell last year for the first time in four years; unemployment is at a two-and-a-half year low; banks are bringing their bad loans under control and consumer prices rose late last year for the first time since 1998, albeit for one-off reasons. "GDP is very strong," said Masaaki Kanno, economist at JP Morgan Chase in Tokyo, "and reflects the recovery of the global economy and the strength of exports." But Mr Kanno said the past quarter's rate of expansion was not sustainable, adding that Japan's annual trend growth was 3 per cent. Growth for the 2003 calendar year was 2.7 per cent. Kazumasa Iwata, Bank of Japan deputy governor, said that if GDP continued to rise at that pace Japan could begin to conquer deflation this year.

II. People's Republic of China

1. ROK's Troops Sending to Iraq

China Daily ("ROK APPROVES SENDING TROOPS TO IRAQ," Seoul/New Delhi, 02/14-15/04, P7) reported that the ROK's parliament on February 13 approved the government's plan to send 3,000 troops to Iraq, responding to its key US ally's call for military help to restore stability to the war-torn nation. The troop dispatch will make the ROK the third-largest contributor to coalition forces after the US and Britain. People in ROK have been divided over sending troops to Iraq. Critics say the war in Iraq was unjustified and have held protests near the National Assembly and the US Embassy in Seoul. Some 500 anti-war activists rallied in front of the National Assembly as the 271-member legislature approved the deployment plan with a 150-50 vote. Dozens of activists briefly scuffled with shield-wielding riot police. Supporters, however, say the dispatch would boost the ROK's military alliance with the US.

2. Inter-Korean Military Talk

China Daily ("S. KOREA PROPOSES INTER-KOREAN MILITARY TALK," Seoul, 02/13/04, P8) reported that ROK on February 12 formally proposed to the DPRK to hold high-level military talks as agreed at a recent inter-Korean ministerial meeting. South Korean Unification Minister Jeong Se-hyun said his ministry had sent such message to the DPRK yesterday morning, but declined to elaborate on the proposed date for the talks, reported South Korean Yonhap News Agency. The talks may focus on how to avoid naval skirmishes around the disputed controversial inter-Korean sea border on the Yellow Sea, the so-called Northern Limit Line.

3. 6-Party Talks

China Daily ("READY FOR 6-PARTY TALKS," Beijing, 02/10/04, P11) reported that PRC and the

DPRK said on February 9 they are ready to make joint efforts to work for progress at the second round of Beijing six-party talks on the Korean Peninsula's nuclear crisis. The consensus was reached at a meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing and DPRK Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Kye-gwan in Beijing yesterday. The two sides also exchanged views on bilateral relations and the nuclear issue, among others. Kim arrived in Beijing last Saturday at the invitation of Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Yi. During his stay in Beijing, Kim held working talks with Wang on issues concerning the second round of six-party talks and met with Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo.

4. DPRK on Pakistan Nuclear Confession

China Daily ("PAKISTAN NUCLEAR CONFESSION A LIE: DPRK," Seoul, 02/11/04, P8) reported that a Pakistani scientist's confession that he sold nuclear weapons technology to the DPRK was a lie cooked up by the US to justify an invasion, DPRK said on February 10. The father of Pakistan's nuclear arms programme, Abdul Qadeer Khan, said last week he had sold nuclear secrets to Libya and two countries President George W. Bush has labelled part of an "axis of evil," - DPRK and Iran. In DPRK's first reaction, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said the US fabricated Khan's story to derail the nuclear talks and lay the groundwork for an Iraq-style invasion. "The United States is now hyping the story about the transfer of nuclear technology to the DPRK by a Pakistani scientist in a bid to make the DPRK's enriched uranium program sound plausible," said the spokesman in a statement published by KCNA news agency.

5. PRC-Japan Relations

People's Daily ("FM: KOIZUMI REMARKS SPARK CHINA DISSATISFACTION," 02/12/04, P4) reported that PRC on February 11 expressed "dissatisfaction and regret" over Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's remarks about justifying his visits to a shrine for Japan's war dead. Asked in parliament on Tuesday if he felt reluctant to visit the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors 14 convicted "Class A" war criminals among 2.5 million other Japanese killed in wartime, Koizumi said: "I have no such feeling." Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said on Wednesday that "China firmly opposes" visits by the Japanese leader to the shrine. PRC hopes Koizumi does not take actions that will offend people from countries victimized by Japan in wartime, she said.

People's Daily ("FM: CHINA NOT ACCEPT JAPAN'S ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE PRESSURE ON THE ISSUE OF DIAOYU ISLAND WITH A THIRD COUNTRY," Beijing, 02/11/04, P4) reported that Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue said on February 10 PRC resolutely opposes and will absolutely not accept Japan's attempt to impose pressure on PRC on the issue of Diaoyu Island with a third country. Zhang made the remarks in response to the question of a reporter who referred to a Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman as reportedly saying recently that the US would fulfill its obligation of defence in view of the security pact with Japan if the Diaoyu Islands were attacked.

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We invite you to reply to today's report, and we welcome commentary or papers for distribution to the network.

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