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Contents in this Issue:

- I. NAPSNet
 - [1. DPRK Nuclear Program](#)
 - [2. Inter-Korean Relations](#)
 - [3. ROK Government Reorganization](#)
 - [4. Alleged DPRK-Syria Nuclear Cooperation](#)
 - [5. ROK-PRC Relations](#)
 - [6. ROK-Japan Relations](#)
 - [7. ROK Space Program](#)
 - [8. Japanese Security Policy](#)
 - [9. Japan Politics](#)
 - [10. Sino-Japanese Relations](#)
 - [11. Cross Strait Relations](#)
 - [12. US-PRC Trade Relations](#)
 - [13. Vietnam-PRC Relations](#)
 - [14. PRC Environment](#)

[Preceding NAPSNet Report](#)

I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Nuclear Program

The Associated Press (Foster Klug, "N.KOREA NUCLEAR STATUS REMAINS UNCHANGED", Washington, 2008/01/17) reported that a U.S. official, in a rare public departure from Bush administration policy, criticized on the nuclear talks with the DPRK, which he contended is not serious about disarming. Jay Lefkowitz, President Bush's envoy on DPRK human rights, said the DPRK will likely "remain in its present nuclear status" when the next U.S. president takes over in January 2009, despite four years of nuclear disarmament efforts. When asked if Lefkowitz was speaking on behalf of the Bush administration, he said U.S. policies "are under review right now" but avoided answering the question directly. After four years of six-nation talks, he said, "it makes sense to review the assumptions upon which previous policy was built and make sure they are still valid today."

Yonhap ("SEOUL DOWNPLAYS US ENVOY'S CRITICISM OF NK POLICY", Seoul, 2008/01/18) reported that Jay Lefkowitz, President George W. Bush's human rights envoy, on Thursday accused the ROK and China of being excessively lenient to the recalcitrant communist nation. "Because the Chinese and South Korean governments have been unwilling to apply significant pressure on Pyongyang, recent talks have, in actuality, become a bilateral negotiation between the U.S. and North Korea " he said in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute. "To my understanding, his comments were not based on the U.S. government's official position," said Cho Hee-yong, spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

[\(return to top\)](#)

2. Inter-Korean Relations

Korea Herald ("LEE TO SPUR NORTH KOREAN REFORM WITH INCENTIVES", 2008/01/17) reported that the ROK's next president said he hopes to entice the DPRK to give up its nuclear weapons program through boosting its economy, but declined to address how he would exert pressure on Pyongyang if it does not respond. "Our cardinal effort will be placed on the complete resolution of the North Korean nuclear problem and concomitantly, the creation of a new peace structure on the Korean Peninsula," Lee said. Lee has proposed to raise the DPRK's per capita income to \$3,000 as his main incentive to prod the DPRK to reverse its policy of confrontation.

Yonhap (Shin Hae-in, "PRESIDENT-ELECT LEE PROMISES 'PATIENCE' ON N. KOREA NUCLEAR ISSUE", Seoul, 2008/01/17) reported that President-elect Lee Myung-bak said that the ROK will adopt a "patient and prudent" approach to the DPRK nuclear standoff through close cooperation with members of six-party nuclear talks after he takes office. "Although the dismantlement is currently being delayed, we need to proceed with patience and prudence," Lee said in a New Year's news conference. "I intend to focus on strengthening the cooperative framework with other members of the six-party talks including the United States, Japan, China and Russia."

Agence France-Presse ("MUSH" REPLACES MASH NORTH OF KOREA'S DMZ", Seoul, 2008/01/17) reported that ROK dogs and handlers will cross the border next month for the first time since the 1950-53 Korean War for a dogsled championship in the DPRK, organisers said. The Korea Federation of Sleddog Sports said three years of efforts to win approval from the DPRK had borne fruit and the event would be held from March 15-17 at the scenic Mount Kumgang resort on the east coast.

[\(return to top\)](#)

3. ROK Government Reorganization

Joonang Ilbo ("UNDP 'SHOCKED AND BAFFLED' OVER MINISTRY'S CLOSURE", Seoul, 2008/01/18) reported that politicians, civic groups and DPRK experts criticized President-elect Lee Myung-bak's plan to dissolve the Unification Ministry by folding it into the Foreign Ministry. The United New Democratic Party feels "shocked and baffled" by the decision, Kim Hyo-seuk, the party's floor leader, said yesterday after meeting with senior party members. The president-elect, in his 'seven diplomatic policies,' placed South-North relations under the category of foreign diplomatic policies, which no other past administration has ever done," said Paik Hak-soon, a DPRK expert at the Sejong Institute, one of the nation's premier diplomacy and national security think tanks. "Past administrations and governments have always put their unification policies and foreign affairs policies on the same level." Lee defended the move, saying "The Ministry of Unification will not disappear. Its functions will remain." He said that instead of all the issues getting funneled just through the Unification Ministry, they will get channeled through all ministries. He said inter-Korean cooperation has become "so large and so complex" that it has to be handled by more than one agency.

[\(return to top\)](#)

4. Alledged DPRK-Syria Nuclear Cooperation

The Los Angeles Times (Paul Richter, "WEST SAYS N. KOREA, SYRIA HAD NUCLEAR LINK", Washington, 2008/01/17) reported that Western governments have concluded that Syria and the DPRK were collaborating on a nuclear weapons program at a mysterious site in the Syrian desert that was bombed by Israel last year, a senior European diplomat said in a rare comment about the episode by a high-ranking official. The diplomat said that after a review of available intelligence, Western governments have reached "some sort of common ground . . . that there seems to have been cooperation between Syria and North Korea" at the site. The official's remarks were made on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject. Yet some observers have remained skeptical that the Syrian structure was part of any nuclear program. Mohamed ElBaradei, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, has said that on the basis of satellite photos, IAEA experts believe it unlikely the site housed a nuclear reactor.

[\(return to top\)](#)

5. ROK-PRC Relations

Yonhap ("SPECIAL ENVOY CONVEYS PRESIDENT-ELECT LEE'S WISH TO FORGE CLOSER TIES WITH CHINA", Beijing, 2008/01/17) reported that the ROK's special envoy to the PRC expressed

President-elect Lee Myung-bak's wish to forge closer ties with Beijing, representatives following Rep. Park Geun-hye said. In a meeting with Hu Jintao in the PRC capital, the three-term lawmaker and former chairwoman of the conservative Grand National Party (GNP) said the incoming administration wants bilateral relations with the PRC to advance to the next level.

[\(return to top\)](#)

6. ROK-Japan Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("JAPANESE PM FUKUDA UPBEAT ABOUT SEOUL-TOKYO RELATIONS", 2008/01/17) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda says Tokyo will support Seoul and cooperate in efforts to reunify the two Koreas. The comments came Wednesday during Fukuda's meeting with Lee Sang-deuk, a special envoy from ROK president-elect Lee Myung-bak. In addition to pledging cooperation in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, Prime Minister Fukuda emphasized the need for greater dialogue and exchange between Seoul and Tokyo on the economic front.

Chosun Ilbo ("NO MORE DEMANDS FOR APOLOGY FROM JAPAN: LEE", Seoul, 2008/01/18) reported that President-elect Lee Myung-bak on Thursday said there will be no more demands for apologies from Japan during his presidency. "For a new, mature Seoul-Tokyo relationship, I don't want to ask them to apologize for, or examine themselves," Lee said. "It's true that Japan has so far only made perfunctory apologies or self-examinations in the past, and such apologies failed to move the Korean people to a large extent. But I'm sure that Japan will conduct a mature diplomacy regardless," he added.

[\(return to top\)](#)

7. ROK Space Program

Chosun Ilbo ("KOREA'S 1ST ASTRONAUT TO MIX KOREAN SOIL IN SPACE", 2008/01/17) reported that the ROK's first astronaut will bring soil from each side of the divided Korean peninsula on his journey into space. Ko San made the remarks in a televised news conference with Reuters. "We still think this is one country. So I'm going to bring the soil of North and South (Korea). I'm going to mix them up in space," he said. The 31-year-old scientist will leave Earth in April aboard a Russian Soyuz rocket and spend 10 days conducting experiments at the International Space Station.

[\(return to top\)](#)

8. Japanese Security Policy

Kyodo ("FUKUDA TO LEAD WORLD ON ENVIRONMENT, MULL PERMANENT SDF DISPATCH LAW", Tokyo, 2008/01/18) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on Friday said he would consider the creation of a permanent law to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces overseas whenever necessary to implement "international peacekeeping activities swiftly and effectively." Fukuda also said he will deepen cooperation with Asian countries while maintaining Japan's alliance with the United States as the cornerstone of the country's security affairs. On the DPRK, he reiterated that Japan will continue to call for denuclearization and make utmost efforts to realize the return of all Japanese nationals abducted by Pyongyang.

[\(return to top\)](#)

9. Japan Politics

Agence France-Presse ("JAPAN'S RULING PARTY FACING WORST EVER CRISIS: FUKUDA", Tokyo, 2008/01/17) reported that Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda warned Thursday that his ruling Liberal Democratic Party is facing the "biggest crisis" since it was established in 1955. Fukuda called for further cooperation from the main opposition Democratic Party (DPJ) and others ahead of the next parliament session starting Friday. "We are in a difficult situation in managing parliamentary affairs," Fukuda said. "But for the DPJ as well, it can only promote its positions if it has support from the public." "Predecessors in our party proudly declared 50 years ago that politics belongs to the people," Fukuda said. "This is the time for both the government and bureaucrats to stand on behalf of the people."

Kyodo News ("LDP GEARS UP FOR NEXT GENERAL ELECTION IN 2008 CAMPAIGN POLICY", Tokyo, 2008/01/17) reported that Japan's governing Liberal Democratic Party reaffirmed its determination to reinvigorate itself in preparation for a possible general election this year, with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda vowing to implement "politics from the standpoint of the general public." In the LDP's 2008 campaign platform adopted at its annual convention in Tokyo, the party, battered in a major election last year, said it will continue to call for the opposition parties, which control the upper house, to hold policy consultations and seek to create a framework to manage the divided Diet.

[\(return to top\)](#)

10. Sino-Japanese Relations

Yomiuri Shimbun (Takanori Kato, "JAPAN ASKED CHINA TO TONE DOWN NANJING INCIDENT EXHIBITS", 2008/01/17) reported that in a rare move made in connection with the PRC's memorials related to its anti-Japanese movement and the subsequent war with Japan, Japan has asked the PRC to tone down the contents of the Memorial Hall to the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre, the top Japanese diplomat in Shanghai said Wednesday. Consul General Yuji Kumamaru said he conveyed the concerns as representing "the government's awareness of the issue." He made specific mention of the number of victims of the massacre--cited as 300,000 at the museum--pointing out that there are various estimates of the number of dead.

[\(return to top\)](#)

11. Cross Strait Relations

Reuters (Chris Buckley, "CHINA URGES U.S. HELP IN BLOCKING TAIWAN VOTE", Beijing, 2008/01/17) reported that the United States stressed on Thursday that it opposes Taiwan plans to hold a referendum on U.N. membership, while the PRC urged Washington to help oppose the vote that it calls a dangerous provocation. Speaking before regular high-level talks with China, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte pointedly criticized the vote planned for March in which Taiwan's independence-leaning President Chen Shui-bian wants approval to seek U.N. membership under the name "Taiwan." The PRC indicated that Taiwan remains its top worry and it wants

Washington efforts to help stifle Chen's plans for the vote alongside presidential elections on the island.

[\(return to top\)](#)

12. US-PRC Trade Relations

Agence France-Presse ("US READY FOR 'BUSINESSLIKE' TRADE SETTLEMENTS WITH CHINA", Washington, 2008/01/17) reported that the US is prepared to settle pending trade disputes with the PRC in a "businesslike manner" if Beijing is willing, the top US trade official said. US Trade Representative Susan Schwab said that President George W. Bush's administration expects the World Trade Organization to begin handing down decisions early this year "that vindicate US claims" in the three cases before the international trade body. The pending cases involve auto parts, intellectual property rights enforcement and market access. In November the PRC agreed to settle another case brought by the US and ended WTO-illegal subsidies. "We are ready, willing to settle these disputes with China in a businesslike manner if the Chinese government wishes to do so, just as with the earlier case," Schwab said.

[\(return to top\)](#)

13. Vietnam-PRC Relations

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA SAYS UPSET OVER VIETNAM FISHERMAN CLASH", Hanoi, 2008/01/17) reported that Vietnam denied reports of an alleged attack by Vietnamese fishing crews on PRC fishermen after the PRC requested a thorough investigation into the incident. PRC state media reported Wednesday that up to 10 PRC boats fishing in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin were attacked and robbed of equipment by about a dozen armed Vietnamese fishing vessels on January 7. "China is highly concerned about the case and has made representations to Vietnam and requested the Vietnamese side seriously investigate," PRC foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu told reporters. Vietnam denied the claims later Thursday.

[\(return to top\)](#)

14. PRC Environment

The Associated Press (Christopher Bodeen, "RISING SEA LEVELS THREATEN CHINA CITIES", Beijing, 2008/01/17) reported that sea levels off Shanghai and other PRC coastal cities are rising at an alarming rate, leading to contamination of drinking water supplies and other threats, the PRC's State Oceanic Administration reported. Waters off the industrial port city of Tianjin, 60 miles southeast of Beijing, rose by 7.72 inches over the past three decades, the administration said. Seas off the business hub of Shanghai have risen by 4.53 inches over the same period, the report said. Administration experts said global climate change and the sinking of coastal land due to the pumping of ground water were the major causes behind rising water levels.

BBC News ("YANGTZE HIT BY DROUGHT IN CHINA", 2008/01/17) reported that the PRC is facing its worst drought in a decade, with water in parts of the Yangtze River at the lowest level in 142 years, state media has reported. Millions of people were short of water, and dozens of ships had run aground in the river since October, reports said. Officials said low water levels in the Yangtze were

not linked to construction of the massive Three Gorges Dam. The PRC faces droughts and floods annually but has seen a recent increase in extreme weather conditions.

[\(return to top\)](#)

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