NAPSNet Daily Report 18 March, 2004

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 18 March, 2004", NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, 2004, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-18-march-2004/

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I. United States

1. DPRK IAEA Inspections

Agence France-Presse "ELBARADEI SAYS IAEA CANNOT RULE OUT IRAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM," Washington, 03/18/04) reported that UN nuclear watchdog chief Mohamed ElBaradei said as he wrapped up a trip to Washington that international inspectors would only return to the DPRK with "comprehensive" rights to examine its atomic program. "I think we are very clear that if we want to go back and do an inspection it has to be a comprehensive inspection everywhere with all the rights we want," ElBaradei told reporters Wednesday after meeting with US President George W. Bush and national security advisor Condoleezza Rice. ElBaradei who heads Thursday from

Washington to International Atomic Energy Agency headquarters in Vienna, said IAEA inspectors were handicapped up to being kicked out of the DPRK last year by a 1994 framework agreement that "gave us the right to do just partial inspections in the Pyongyang area without looking anywhere else." The IAEA has since 1997 been trying to get nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) member states to agree to an additional protocol to the NPT that authorizes wider, short-notice inspections. "Obviously we need a robust system whereby we can go on short notice, can do environmental sampling ... can do all it takes to make sure that we are not being cheated," ElBaradei said. He said he and Bush had not "spent much time on the specifics of North Korea other than to say it is a problem" for which a solution must be found. "We need to work together to have a comprehensive system of verification," he said. He said North Korea clearly has the capability to make nuclear weapons "if not the bomb already." It is a "dangerous" situation and the question is "how to contain it," ElBaradei said.

2. DPRK Nuclear Tension

The Associated Press ("NORTH KOREA RAISES NUCLEAR TENSION," Seoul, 03/18/04) reported that the DPRK is raising the stakes in its standoff with the ROK and the US, declaring that it is strengthening its "nuclear deterrent" and accusing the ROK of ratcheting up tensions by impeaching its president. Meanwhile, the ROK's interim leader is calling for a stronger alliance with the US, dismissing the DPRK's claim that the ROK's parliamentary impeachment of President Roh Moo-hyun last week reflected US interference to "install an ultra-right pro-US regime" in Seoul. As the unprecedented impeachment spawned uncertainty, the ROK has ordered heightened military vigilance against the DPRK. It is also going ahead with annual joint military exercises with the US, scheduled to begin Sunday, to test the allies' defense readiness. The DPRK on Wednesday accused the ROK of "kicking up a racket of confrontation with the North." "This attitude ... is a grave provocation to the compatriots in the North," said the DPRK's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland. The DPRK said Wednesday that it was strengthening its "nuclear deterrent" -- its term for nuclear weapons development. It blamed the US for the lack of breakthroughs in last month's six-nation nuclear talks, and accused the US of hiking tensions on the Korean peninsula by holding this weekend's joint military exercises with the ROK.

3. PRC-DPRK Foreign Minister Visit

Bloomberg ("CHINA'S FOREIGN MINISTER WILL VISIT NORTH KOREA," 03/18/04) reported that PRC Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing will visit the DPRK from March 23-26 to discuss six-nation talks on the DPRK's nuclear weapons development program. It will be the visit by a PRC foreign minister in five years. "China's trying hard to resolve this issue," Chinese Foreign ministry spokesman Kong Quan said at a regular news briefing in Beijing. "We will have further, in-depth exchanges of views with them" on forming a working group.

4. ROK Presidential Impeachment

Agence France-Presse ("COURT SUMMONS ROH FOR MARCH 30 IMPEACHMENT HEARING," 03/18/04) reported that the ROK's Constitutional Court will summon President Roh Moo-Hyun to appear in person on March 30 for a hearing on his impeachment, the court's head says. "We set the date for the first hearing on the case," said Yun Young-Chul. Yun said the court would call Roh and his counsellors and representatives of two opposition parties which led the impeachment of Roh in parliament last week. Yonhap news agency said the first public hearing will take place on March 30, quoting Yun. The decision came at a meeting of the nine judges of the Constitutional Court, which

was convened for the first time since Roh was suspended from office by the impeachment. The court has up to 180 days to decide whether to endorse or reject Roh's impeachment for alleged election law violations, corruption and incompetence.

5. ROK Impeachment Economic Impact

Asia Pulse ("S KOREA'S POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY MAY HURT ECONOMIC RECOVERY," Daejeon, 03/18/04) reported that ROK Finance Minister Lee Hun-jai said today that political uncertainly triggered by the passage of an impeachment motion against President Roh Moo-hyun on March 12 could have negative consequences for economic recovery. Speaking to customs officials at the Daejeon Government Complex, the official said that the government will do its utmost to limit any adverse effects the latest political unrest will have on the economy, especially since indications pointed toward positive growth. He said that although there were problems such as high youth unemployment, which rose past 9 per cent in February, the financial market was stabilizing. Lee said that with economic reforms being pushed forward, and exports remaining a solid engine of growth, business investments should improve in the coming months, spelling good news for the entire economy.

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7. US-ROK Relations

Yonhap ("U.S. VICE PRESIDENT TO VISIT SOUTH KOREA NEXT MONTH," Seoul, 03/19/04) reported that US Vice President Dick Cheney plans to visit the ROK next month, a government official said Friday. Cheney will arrive here around April 15 for a two-day visit, part of a trip that is likely to include stops in the PRC and Japan, the official said, asking not to be identified.

8. Japan-Russia Relations

Kyodo ("JAPAN TOLD TO LEAVE RUSSIA-HELD ISLANDS OUT OF PEACE TALKS," Moscow, 03/18/04) reported that newly appointed Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has warned Japan against insisting that disputed Russian-held islands be handed to Japan before the conclusion of a bilateral peace treaty. "We will deal with it on the basis of the Constitution," Lavrov told an inaugural media conference Wednesday, tacitly reminding Japan that Russia needs to address the territorial preservation and integrity stipulated under the Constitution. Lavrov said he will step up efforts toward concluding a peace treaty. "The relations with Japan are progressing," he said. "Both nations have a desire to conclude a peace treaty under an agreement between their leaders." The dispute, involving four islands off Hokkaido, has prevented the two countries from signing a peace treaty. The islands were seized by Soviet troops at the end of World War II. Lavrov said he intends to seek a political resolution to the prolonged conflict over North Korea's nuclear ambitions through the six-way talks that also involve China, Japan, North and South Korea, and the US. As a former Russian ambassador to the United Nations, Lavrov said he is committed to focusing on the U.N.'s

role in resolving regional conflicts and fighting terrorism.

9. US-Hong Kong Relations

Agence France-Presse ("US DELEGATES TO MEET HONG KONG DEMOCRATS," 03/18/04) reported that advisers to the US Congress on China are set to meet leading Hong Kong democrats in a move likely to fuel a heated debate over the former British colony's transition to democracy. The high-level US delegation led by Richard D'Amato, vice-chairman of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, will meet legislator Martin Lee and Democratic Party leader Yeung Sum among others. The involvement of senior US officials is likely to provoke hardliners in the PRC and Hong Kong who took a dim view of a recent trip by Lee to promote his cause before the Senate in Washington. The veteran democracy campaigner was accused of inviting foreign interference in internal PRC matters. Hong Kong's leading civil servant Donald Tsang broke his silence on the issue Wednesday, saying political change should be brought about gradually and that the territory should not be used as a political testing ground. "Constitutional development is a complicated issue," he told legislators. "Never shall we treat Hong Kong as a guinea pig by giving some political systems a trial."

10. PRC Internet Censorship

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA TARGETS BLOGS IN LATEST CENSORSHIP OF INTERNET," 03/18/04) reported that the PRC is targeting blogs -- diary-style personal pages for Internet users -- in its latest attempt to censor the increasing popularity of the Internet in the country, according to a rights group. Two sites hosting blogs for thousands of people -- who express their views about news, themselves or anything they want -- have been shut down by the government, the Paris-based media rights group Reporters Without Borders said. One of the blogs, "BlogBus.com," hosted more than 15,000 blogs that have now been made inaccessible, the group said in a statement. The site was shut down on March 11 for allowing a letter to be posted that was critical of the government. The blog website could not be opened Thursday. "Due to the fact that the content in some blog user's blog violated regulations, the web server has been temporarily shut," a message said on the website. "We will try resolve the problem as quickly as possible." The other blog hosting site, "Blogcn.com," was shut down on March 14. It was also inaccessible Thursday.

11. OpEd: Losting Time on North Korea

New York Times ("LOSING TIME ON NORTH KOREA," 03/18/04) carried a general OpEd that reported that the DPRK nuclear threat is not the kind of problem that grows easier to solve with time. If time is on anyone's side, it is on that of Pyongyang's aspiring bomb makers. The country continues to reject the restraints of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, keeping international inspectors away from its known plutonium reprocessing unit and suspected uranium enrichment plants, while defiantly proclaiming progress toward building a bomb. Yet the Bush administration appears oddly content to let the situation drift forward, at least through this year's presidential elections. Such a lack of urgency could prove costly to America's future security. Granted, there are no attractive diplomatic or military options available and no guarantees that North Korea is seriously interested in a peaceful solution. Still, considering what Pyongyang might do with a fully developed nuclear arsenal - like blackmailing its neighbors or selling bomb ingredients to anyone with enough cash - Washington should be energetically probing for diplomatic opportunities. So far, it has merely been going through the motions. Midlevel American officials have now sat through two rounds of six-nation talks on North Korea in Beijing, and despite the lack of visible results, have dutifully

pronounced them useful. Yet all parties understand that no serious progress can be expected in these talks unless Washington steps forward and spells out the concrete diplomatic and economic steps it would take if the North agreed to verifiably dismantle all its nuclear programs. President Bush once rejected doing so on principle, saying it would be wrong to reward North Korea for giving up nuclear weapons programs it had repeatedly promised not to undertake in the first place. Since then, the White House has adopted a more pragmatic view. It has broadly indicated its willingness to give North Korea security guarantees, improved relations and economic help once the North follows Libya's example and abandons all of its nuclear programs - military and civilian, plutonium-based and uranium-based. What it cannot bring itself to do is negotiate specific, simultaneous steps to achieve that goal. It insists, unrealistically, that North Korea commit itself to full disarmament before America offers anything concrete in return. The administration seems intent on using the talks to convince the four other participants - South Korea, Japan, China and Russia - that North Korea is not interested in a diplomatic solution at all. Some of those countries have begun to show increasing impatience with North Korea's belligerent language and unwillingness to put all of its cards on the table. But none of these countries, all neighbors of North Korea, are prepared to give up on diplomacy, in part because they all have much too much to lose from any military confrontation. Left to themselves, America's partners in the six-party negotiations would talk forever, all the while claiming that diplomatic progress was being made in minute increments. North Korea is also happy to let the talks drag on, as it proceeds unhindered with its nuclear weapons development. The country in a hurry for a diplomatic solution ought to be the United States.

II. Japan

1. Japan Iraq Troops Dispatch

Kyodo ("ASDF FLIES SOCCER BALLS, SUPPLIES INTO SAMAWAH," Kuwait city, 03/04/04) reported that the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) airlifted humanitarian supplies and goods into Iraq on its first flight under Japan's Iraq reconstruction mission, ASDF officials said. An ASDF C-130 transport plane flew from Kuwait to an airport near the southern Iraqi city of Samawah, where Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) troops are stationed in their mission to rebuild local infrastructure, provide drinking water and offer medical services. Reflecting Japan's policy to emphasize humanitarian assistance, the 2 tons of cargo included medical equipment and soccer balls. After returning to Kuwait, Colonel Atsuyuki Nitta told reporters he was relieved the flight was successful and incident-free. He said he did not believe any future cargo shipped by the ASDF would include arms or ammunition. The ASDF planes might transport US military personnel in the future, according to sources close to the operation.

The Japan Times ("JAPAN TO PROVIDE $450 MILLION TO IRAQ," 03/06/04) reported that Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi said that Japan will provide $450 million to international trust funds to promote the reconstruction of Iraq and disburse 2 billion yen to nongovernmental organizations. Of the $450 million, $360 million will be provided to a fund managed by the UN Development Program and $90 million to a fund managed by the World Bank, she said. The disbursement is part of Japan's pledge of $5 billion in aid for Iraq, including $1.5 billion in grants for 2004, between 2004 and 2007. Kawaguchi said the government will also provide 2 billion yen to Japan Platform, an umbrella organization of humanitarian assistance groups. Of that amount, 1.7 billion yen will be provided to help the aid groups' activities in such fields as welfare, health and education in Iraq, and the remaining 300 million yen for humanitarian assistance in areas other than Iraq, she said.

Kyodo ("GSDF CHIEF PLANNING TO VISIT SAMAWAH," Samawah, Iraq, 03/08/04) reported that

General Hajime Massaki, chief of staff of the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), is planning to visit Samawah as early as this month to inspect the GSDF's activities, sources said. The Defense Agency and other relevant organizations are now in the final stages of talks over his visit, which is aimed at boosting troop moral amid split public opinion over their dispatch to assist in reconstruction work, they said. It would be the first time for any GSDF chief of staff to set foot in an area where a military conflict is still ongoing. Observers said Massaki's visit may also be intended to lay the groundwork for a similar trip by Defense Agency Director General Shigeru Ishiba. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has also expressed a desire to visit the troops "if the situation allows." The sources added, however, that the schedule could change should there be major changes in the local security situation, such as attacks on the GSDF or Japanese in Samawah.

2. Japan Defence Agency's Promotion

The Japan Times ("DEFENSE AGENCY MAY BECOME MINISTRY," 03/05/04) reported that three defense-related panels of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) agreed at a joint meeting to submit a bill to upgrade the Defense Agency to ministry status during the ongoing Diet session. Whether the Diet will begin deliberating the bill remains uncertain, however, as there is still opposition toward the plan within the ruling coalition. "The Environment Agency became a ministry because environmental issues are important. It is not right as a nation not to make (the Defense Agency) a ministry now that defense issues have grown so important," House of Representatives member Takeshi Noda said in promoting the legislation at the meeting.

3. Japan Nuclear Waste Management

Kyodo ("NUCLEAR WASTE SHIPMENT ARRIVES," Aomori, 03/05/04) reported that a freighter carrying highly radioactive reprocessed Japanese nuclear waste from Cherbourg in northern France arrived in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture. The waste is to be placed in a long-term storage facility at Rokkasho, officials said. After being offloaded from the 5,000-ton Pacific Swan at Mutsu-Ogawara port, 132 cases of waste, which has been packed into solidified glass, will be transported about 7 km and kept at the facility, owned by Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., for 30 to 50 years. The shipment is the ninth of its kind. The Tokyo, Chubu, Kansai, Shikoku and Kyushu electric utilities own the waste, which was reprocessed in France from spent nuclear fuel removed from nuclear reactors in Japan.

4. Japan Constitutional Revision

The Asahi Shimbun ("LDP MOVES CLOSER TO CONSTITUTION CHANGE," 03/08/04) reported that the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) plans to submit two bills to the Diet that will clarify procedures to amend the Constitution, party leaders said. One of the bills defines the framework for a national plebiscite and the other revises the Diet Law. The "national plebiscite bill" clarifies two key matters that are vague in current statutes. People who will be able to vote on constitutional amendments in a national plebiscite are, in principle, those who can vote in conventional nationwide elections. It also stipulates that amendments will be adopted when "more than half the valid votes" in a national plebiscite approve the amendments. Current law says the Constitution can be amended if more than half approve, but it does not define what constitutes one half. Under the "revised bill to the current Diet Law," a lawmaker has to collect the support of at least 100 Lower House members and 50 Upper House members to submit a constitutional amendment bill to the Diet. The numbers 100 and 50 are much larger than the 20 and 10 required for conventional bills or the 50 and 20 needed for budget-related bills. New Komeito initially withheld support for the two amendment bills. It agreed only when the LDP accepted New Komeito's bill allowing foreigners who have permanent

residency status to vote in local elections. However, the bills will have to wait for approval until the next Diet session. Lawmakers already have a full schedule of deliberation on other issues, they said. The LDP decided to go ahead with the submission in an effort to gain public support for its position and to promote intra-party discussions.

The Japan Times ("NEW KOMEITO WARY ON REFERENDUM," 03/08/04) reported that Kazuo Kitagawa, chairman of New Komeito's Policy Research Council, remained cautious about submitting a bill to the Diet on a national referendum for revising the Constitution. Appearing on a TV Asahi program, Kitagawa suggested that while he is not opposed to the compilation of such a bill, he remains cautious about submitting it during the current legislative session, saying, "We are still discussing details of the bill, and when we should submit the bill is another matter."

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.

Produced by the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development in partnership with:

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