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Preceding NAPSNet Report

MARKTWO

I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Missile Program

Yonhap ("N. KOREA MAY HAVE SEA-BASED MISSILE SYSTEM: REPORT", Seoul, 2009/03/17) reported that the DPRK may have developed a sea-based missile system that could pose a significant threat to the mainland United States, according to a recent US Congressional Research Report. The DPRK reportedly purchased 12 decommissioned Russian Foxtrot and Golf-II class submarines for scrap metal from a Japanese company. "The Golf-IIs, which are capable of carrying three SS-N-5 SLBMs, did not have their missiles or electronic firing systems when they were sold to the North Koreans, but they did allegedly retain significant launch sub-systems including launch tubes and stabilization systems," said the report.

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2. ROK on DPRK Missile Program

Joongang Ilbo ("SEOUL TO TRACK LAUNCH WITH HIGH-TECH AEGIS SYSTEM", Seoul, 2009/03/18) reported that a high-ranking official in the ROK Navy said Monday that if the DPRK missile is fired, the King Sejong the Great, its 7,600-ton warship equipped with the Aegis combat system, will trck it. “We’ve dispatched our personnel to the U.S.S. Chafee, a United States Navy Aegis destroyer,” the official continued, “so that they can train with the Americans while they’re here for the Key Resolve military drills." Once the exercise wraps up this Friday, the official said, “The King Sejong will be deployed on the east coast to prepare for the launch of the Taepodong-2.”

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3. DPRK Threat to ROK

Yonhap ("N. KOREA MAY LAUNCH SURPRISE ATTACK ON S. KOREA: MINISTRY", Seoul, 2009/03/18) reported that the DPRK will likely carry out a surprise attack on the ROK, simultaneously with the launch of a rocket in early April, the ROK defense ministry warned Wednesday. "There is a good possibility North Korea may make a surprise but limited attack on some areas along the inter-Korean border, with global attention mounting on its planned missile launch," the ministry said. "It appears the North is trying to incite internal conflict in the South while pressuring the United States' Obama administration to come to bilateral talks at an early date," it said.

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4. Inter-Korean Relations

Chosun Ilbo ("SEOUL MULLING LIST OF TARGETS FOR N.KOREA SANCTIONS", Seoul, 2009/03/18) reported that the ROK government is considering drafting a list of targets for sanctions in case the DPRK launches a long-range missile. A government official said, "Considering the positions of China and Russia, it's not easy to reach a new resolution at the UN Security Council if the North keeps insisting that the projectile it plans to launch is a satellite. But there is some consensus that the North's launch of such a projectile would itself constitute a violation of Resolution 1718, even if it is a satellite." He said a "realistic alternative" would be to step up sanctions according to the resolution.

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5. Inter-Korea Economic Cooperation

Associated Press (Kwang-tae Kim, "SEOUL RULES OUT CLOSING ECONOMIC ZONE IN NORTH", Seoul, 2009/03/18) reported that the ROK ruled out closing the Kaesong industrial complex on Wednesday. "We are not considering shutting down" the Kaesong complex, Unification Minister Hyun In-taek said. Hyun warned that Seoul would consider another shutdown "very grave" and would "take necessary steps" to ensure workers and cargo can cross the border.

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6. Russia on DPRK Missile Launch

Xinhua News ("RUSSIA WARNS AGAINST DRAMATIZING DPRK'S SATELLITE LAUNCH ", Moscow, 2009/03/17) reported that a senior Russian diplomat said on Tuesday that the upcoming launch of a Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) satellite should not be overdramatized. "The world community should carefully weigh all circumstances of the satellite launch due in early April and to refrain from fanning panic," Itar-Tass news agency quoted Russian Foreign Ministry's special envoy Grigory Loginov as saying.

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7. Sino-DPRK Relations

Agence France-Press ("CHINA'S PM WEN JIABAO MEETS N.KOREAN COUNTERPART", Beijing, 2009/03/18) reported that ROK Prime Minister Wen Jiabao met his visiting DPRK counterpart Kim Yong Il on Wednesday. "I would like to exchange views broadly and deeply on issues of the Sino-North Korean relationship, and issues of common concern," Wen told Kim in remarks that opened the talks. "Your visit has positive significance of promoting the Sino-North Korean relationship and improving the friendship between the peoples of the two countries."

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8. Russo-DPRK Relations

RIA Novosti ("PUTIN CONGRATULATES N.KOREA ON 60 YEARS OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION", 2009/03/17) reported that Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin congratulated on Tuesday his DPRK counterpart Kim Yong-il on the 60th anniversary of an agreement between the two countries on economic and cultural cooperation. "This is the first document in the history of our bilateral relations, which laid a legal basis for the development of mutually beneficial and equal cooperation - not only economic and cultural, but in all other spheres as well," Putin said in his congratulatory telegram.

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9. US-DPRK Relations

BBC News ("NORTH KOREA REFUSES US FOOD AID", 2009/03/18) reported that the US says the DPRK has refused to accept any further food aid supplies. Five aid groups have been told to leave the DPRK by the end of March, the US state department and aid groups said. Joy Portella, a spokeswoman for Mercy Corps, said they had been ordered to leave without any reason being given.

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10. DPRK Food Supply

IFES NK Brief ("DPRK PREPARING FOR SPRING FERTILIZER SHORTAGES", 2009/03/17) reported that the DPRK, facing chronic food deficiencies, is again looking at fertilizer shortages as the spring farming season approaches. DPRK authorities and farmers are particularly troubled by the fact that, just as last year, the likelihood of receiving chemical fertilizer aid from the ROK is practically non-existent. According to Tae-Jin Kwon, leading researcher at the Korea Rural Economic Institute, the DPRK drastically increased chemical fertilizer imports from PRC in order to prepare for the possibility of a continued hold on ROK fertilizer aid, purchasing approximately 40 times more fertilizer at the end of last year and this January than it imported during the same period a year earlier.

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11. US Military in ROK

Hankyoreh Shinmun ("SEVERE POLLUTION LEVELS DETECTED AT 13 U.S. BASES SCHEDULED FOR RETURN TO S. KOREA", Seoul, 2009/03/18) reported that severe pollution levels have been detected at 13 United States military bases nationwide scheduled to be returned to the ROK, with lead levels detected at more than 150 times the standard value at one U.S. firing range. These data are the result of a study of environmental pollution at U.S. military bases conducted by the U.S. military and the ROK government. Green Korea United Manager Hwang Min-hyeok stated, “If discussions for the bases’ return continue without any revision to the Status of Forces Agreement, at a level that can be agreed upon mutually with regard to the treatment levels and procedures, we will end up bearing expenses in the trillions of won.”

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12. Terrorist Attacks Against ROK

Agence France-Press (Hamoud Mounasser, "YEMEN BOMBERS TARGET S.KOREANS", Sanaa, 2009/03/18) reported that a suicide bomber on Wednesday attacked an ROK delegation visiting Yemen. No-one was killed or injured in the blast. "Vehicles carrying our government officials and bereaved family members came under a terrorist attack today. Nobody was harmed," said a foreign ministry official in Seoul. The South Koreans were visiting after four ROK tourists were killed on Sunday in an attack blamed on the local branch of Al-Qaeda. Foreign ministry spokesman Moon Tae-Young said it was unclear whether Wednesday's explosion was aimed at Koreans or whether the bomber believed the convoy was carrying Yemeni officials, since it was led by a police car . "We are urging our diplomatic missions , Korean travellers and businessmen in the region to be cautious about possible dangers," he said.

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13. ROK on Japan Whaling Issue

Agence France-Presse ("SKOREA SAYS IT MAY START WHALING IF JAPAN CLINCHES DEAL", Rome, 2009/03/17) reported that the ROK said it may start commercial whaling if Japan wins a controversial compromise with the International Whaling Commission, observers to a meeting of the body said. "We've been warning all along that if Japan gets a deal other countries are going to want part of the action," Sue Fisher, policy director for North America for the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS), told AFP. "It's no surprise that they said that," said Sara Holden of Greenpeace International. "South Korea's position on whaling has been fairly consistent throughout."

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14. Japan Politics

Kyodo News ("OTA PLAYS DOWN POSSIBILITY OF JOINING DPJ COALITION AFTER ELECTION",

Tokyo, 2009/03/17) reported that New Komeito party leader Akihiro Ota played down the possibility Wednesday that his party would immediately leave its coalition with the Liberal Democratic Party and join a new coalition led by the Democratic Party of Japan if the DPJ beats the LDP at the next general election. ''The coalition with the LDP has become mature,'' Ota told a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo. ''We will make all-out efforts to secure a majority in the election so we can maintain the coalition.''

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15. Japan Energy

Kyodo News ("JAPAN SOLAR POWER INDUSTRY MAY GENERATE 10 TRIL. YEN IN 2020 ", Tokyo, 2009/03/17) reported that Japan's solar power industry will generate up to 10 trillion yen worth of economic benefits in 2020, if the industry manages to secure more than a third of the global market, the industry ministry said Wednesday. A study panel at the ministry also estimated that the industry will create up to about 100,000 new jobs in Japan in 2020, if domestic solar cell makers achieve that market share in terms of production, up from the current 25 percent.

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16. Japan Nuclear Power

Asahi Shimbun ("COURT, CITING 'ADEQUATE SAFETY,' OVERTURNS RULING TO SHUT DOWN NUCLEAR PLANT", 2009/03/17) reported that a court here Wednesday overturned a lower court's recommendation to shut down one of the nation's largest nuclear reactors because its construction was based on outdated quake resistance guidelines. The Nagoya High Court's Kanazawa branch ruled that "adequate safety measures have been taken" at the No. 2 reactor at Hokuriku Electric Power Co.'s Shika nuclear plant in Ishikawa Prefecture, and the facility "does not pose a real danger to the lives and health of residents" nearby. Presiding Judge Nobuaki Watanabe, saying the nuclear plant meets current quake resistance standards, rejected the 128 plaintiffs' request for the reactor to shut down.

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17. Sino-Japanese Relations

Bloomberg News ("ASO DELAYS CHINA SUMMIT; ISLAND DISPUTE NOT ", 2009/03/17) reported that Japan’s Prime Minister Taro Aso postponed a planned visit to the PRC because of scheduling difficulties. A foreign ministry spokesman dismissed a report that the PRC requested the delay because of a territorial dispute. “We wanted to have an early summit meeting, but it became difficult for the prime minister to visit in March,” Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone said at a press conference in Tokyo. “This is because of circumstances in China, as well as here because of the Diet session. But both sides remain committed to meeting soon.”

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18. Cross Strait Relations

Agence France Press ("TAIWAN TO CUT SIZE OF ARMED FORCES AMID WARMING CHINA TIES", Taipei, 2009/03/17) reported that Taiwan plans to cut the size of its armed forces by more than a fifth by 2014, as tensions with the PRC continue to ease, the defense ministry said Monday. The measures, which will take the total number of troops to 215,000, are part of a defense review that will also see compulsory military service scrapped within five years.

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19. US on Cross Strait Relations

Agence France-Presse ("US HAILS TAIWAN STEPS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH CHINA", Taipei, 2009/03/17) reported that the US praised the steps Taiwan has taken under President Ma Ying-jeou to reduce decades-old hostilities with the PRC. Raymond Burghardt, chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan, or AIT, outlined Washington's views as he met Ma on his first visit to the island since the inauguration of U.S. President Barack Obama. "The Obama administration, like the (former U.S. President George W.) Bush administration before, has a very positive view of the progress that has been made since last May in restoring dialogue and the many steps toward the improvement of the cross-Strait relationship," said Burghardt.

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20. Sino-Australian Military Relations

Xinhua News ("CHINA, AUSTRALIA VOW TO EXPAND MILITARY COOPERATION", 2009/03/17) reported that the PRC and Australia agreed Monday to expand military cooperation. "China will spare no effort to support the implementation of any relevant consensus between the Chinese and Australian armed forces and will continue expanding communication, deepen practical cooperation and raise bilateral military ties to a new level," said Chen Bingde, Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army, in a meeting here with Australian Chief of the Army, Ken Gillespie.

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21. PRC Security

The Associated Press ("BOMB LOBBED AT POLICE STATION IN CHINA'S WEST", 2009/03/17) reported that a bomb blast in an unoccupied police station in a Tibetan area in western PRC has added to tensions during a sensitive month marking the anniversaries of violent anti-government uprisings and the Dalai Lama's exile to India. The explosion shattered windows at the newly built station in Bogexi, a town in the predominantly Tibetan Ganzi prefecture, police official Liu Xiaojun said. The state-run China Daily newspaper blamed the blast on "terrorists," a term PRC officials have used to characterize followers of the Dalai Lama. The report provided no other details.

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22. PRC Protest

The Australian ("CHINA'S MIDDLE CLASS DERAILS NEW LINK", 2009/03/17) reported that PRC middle-class protesters have chalked up their first big win against a new infrastructure project -- demonstrating that the not-in-my-backyard syndrome can derail government dreams even in the PRC. The protesters have thwarted an extension of the world's first commercial high-speed magnetic levitation (maglev) railway in Shanghai built at a cost of $2billion by German engineering firms Siemens and ThyssenKrupp.

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23. PRC Economy

The Washington Post ("CHINA GAINS KEY ASSETS IN SPATE OF PURCHASES", 2009/03/17) reported that PRC companies have been on a shopping spree in the past month, snapping up tens of billions of dollars' worth of key assets in Iran , Brazil , Russia , Venezuela , Australia and France in a global fire sale set off by the financial crisis. The deals have allowed the PRC to lock up supplies of oil, minerals, metals and other strategic natural resources it needs to continue to fuel its growth. The sheer scope of the agreements marks a shift in global finance, roiling energy markets and feeding worries about the future availability and prices of those commodities in other countries that compete for them, including the United States.

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II. PRC Report

24. PRC Civil Society and Public Health

China Red Ribbon Net ("'TRAINING FOR HIV/AIDS INTERVENTIONS IN EMERGENCY SETTINGS' HELD IN CHENGDU", 2009/03/17) reported that on March 14 - 15, “Training for HIV/AIDS Interventions in Emergency Settings”, sponsored by Aibai Chengdu GLBT Youth Center and The United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS(UNAIDS), was held in Chengdu. The training last 2 days and over 40 persons received trainings and mastered how to respond timely and properly for HIV/AIDS interventions in emergency settings.

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25. PRC Environment

Xinhua Net (Shi Zhiyong, "SHANXI TO ESTABLISH 89 DRINKING WATER SAFETY MONITORING CENTERS IN RURAL AREAS", 2009/03/17) reported that in 2009, Shanxi province is to invest 17.8 million RMB for the construction of Drinking Water Safety Monitoring Centers in rural areas. Affected by mineral development, agricultural and industrial pollution and other factors, drinking water safety in rural areas is facing a serious threat. The Monitoring Center will carry out sampling,

chemical examination and other work to ensure the drinking water safety for farmers.

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26. PRC Energy Supply

Xinhua Net (Li Jiangtao, "CHINA'S BIOLOGICAL GASIFICATION TECHNOLOGY OF STRAW PROGRESSES A LOT", 2009/03/17) reported that after over ten years' research, the research team led by Professor Li Xiujin of Beijing University of Chemical Technology has made great advances on the technology of biological gasification of straw. The advanced technology can increase the gas production of straw by 50% - 120%, providing a prerequisite for the large scale biological gasification of straw.

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