

NAPSNet Daily Report 21 December, 2009

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 21 December, 2009", NAPSNet Daily Report, December 21, 2009,
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-21-december-2009/>

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Contents in this Issue:

- I. Napsnet
 - [1. US-DPRK Relations](#)
 - [2. DPRK Weapons Shipments](#)
 - [3. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Program](#)
 - [4. PRC on DPRK Nuclear Program](#)
 - [5. Inter-Korean Naval Clashes](#)
 - [6. Inter Korean Relations](#)
 - [7. DPRK Influenza](#)
 - [8. DPRK Economy](#)
 - [9. DPRK Human Rights](#)
 - [10. Japanese Wives in DPRK](#)
 - [11. DPRK Leadership](#)
 - [12. ROK Cyber Security](#)
 - [13. ROK Land Mine Removal](#)
 - [14. ROK Military Procurements](#)
 - [15. ROK Military](#)
 - [16. ROK Climate Change](#)

- [17. US Forces in Japan](#)
- [18. Japanes Politics](#)
- [19. Japanese Influenza](#)
- [20. Cross Strait Relations](#)
- [21. PRC Ethnic Unrest](#)
- [22. PRC Climate Change](#)
- [23. PRC Internet](#)

[Preceding NAPSNet Report](#)

MARKTWO

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

1. US-DPRK Relations

Yonhap ("U.S. HAS NOT PROPOSED SETTING UP LIAISON OFFICE IN PYONGYANG", Seoul, 2009/12/20) reported that the White House denied Friday that it has proposed a liaison office in Pyongyang next year if the DPRK returns to the six-party talks. "It's untrue. No such proposal has been made," said Benjamin Chang, deputy spokesman for the National Security Council. Chang was responding to a media report that President Barack Obama made the proposal in a letter to DPRK leader Kim Jong-il, delivered by Stephen Bosworth, special representative for DPRK policy.

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

2. DPRK Weapons Shipments

Yonhap ("N.K. WEAPONS SEIZED IN BANGKOK WERE HEADED FOR THE MIDDLE EAST", Seoul, 2009/12/20) reported that the DPRK weapons seized in Bangkok last week were bound for the Middle East, the chief U.S. intelligence official said Friday. "Teamwork among different agencies in the United States and partners abroad just last week led to the interdiction of a Middle East-bound cargo of North Korean weapons," said Dennis Blair, director of national intelligence, in a contribution to the Washington Post titled "Strengthening our nation's front line of defense."

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

3. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Program

Korea Times (Kim Sue-young, "CHO HYUN-DONG NAMED AS CHIEF FOR NK NUKES", Seoul, 2009/12/20) reported that Cho Hyun-dong, a presidential aide on foreign affairs and security, was appointed the new director general for the DPRK nuclear issues, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade said Sunday. He replaces Hwang Joon-kuk, who was named the new minister counselor at the Korean Embassy in the United States.

Yonhap ("S. KOREA AFFIRMS N.K. UNABLE TO MINIATURIZE NUKES", Seoul, 2009/12/21) reported that the ROK said Monday that the DPRK has yet to obtain the technology to miniaturize nuclear bombs. "There have been no substantial information or conclusive tips" to indicate the DPRK has developed the capability to mount nuclear warheads on missiles, said Won Tae-jae, spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense. On Sunday, the Korea Institute of Defense Analyses, a state-run defense think tank, reportedly concluded that the DPRK may soon become capable of successfully producing a small nuclear warhead. Won said the reports amount to general assumptions and that the ROK keeps close tabs on activities by the DPRK to develop the technology.

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

4. PRC on DPRK Nuclear Program

Chosun Ilbo ("CHINA NAMES NEW POINT MAN TO NUCLEAR TALKS", Seoul, 2009/12/21) reported that the PRC is replacing its ambassadors to the ROK and Japan in anticipation of the six-party talks resuming, Kyodo reported Saturday. The PRC has unofficially decided to appoint its ambassador to the ROK, Cheng Yonghua, as ambassador to Japan, replacing Cui Tiankai, who is expected to become a vice foreign minister and succeed Wu Dawei as chair of the six-party talks. Citing sources in Beijing, Kyodo wrote, "The planned appointment of Cui indicates China's willingness to move forward the six-party denuclearization talks."

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

5. Inter-Korean Naval Clashes

Associated Press (Jae-soon Chang, "NORTH KOREA DECLARES DISPUTED WATERS 'FIRING ZONE'", Seoul, 2009/12/21) reported that the DPRK declared waters along the Northern Limit Line a "firing zone" Monday and warned ships from the ROK to stay away from the area. The naval command in Pyongyang accused the ROK of "reckless military provocations" in the area in an attempt to hold on to what it called an illegal border. "All fishing boats and warships are required to take security measures by themselves in that zone to protect themselves," the naval command said in a statement, carried by the Korean Central News Agency.

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

6. Inter Korean Relations

Associated Press ("REPORT: KOREAS FAR APART OVER SUMMIT CONDITIONS", Seoul, 2009/12/20) reported that the two Koreas held a series of secret meetings to discuss a possible summit, but failed to reach agreement, Yonhap said Sunday. The two sides held a secret meeting in October in Singapore and two follow-up meetings in November at a DPRK border town. It said the ROK rejected the DPRK's demand for 100,000 tons of food aid in exchange for its agreement to a summit. Pyongyang officials, meanwhile, rejected Seoul's demand that a summit address the standoff over the DPRK's nuclear programs. The DPRK also refused to return some of hundreds of DPRK citizens believed held in the communist nation, Yonhap said.

Korea Times (Kang Hyun-kyung, "GUIDELINES FOR INTER-KOREAN RELATIONS REVISED", Seoul, 2009/12/18) reported that the Ministry of Unification plans to completely rewrite its five-year plan

for strategy and policy direction with regard to inter-Korean relations by January, linking inter-Korean economic cooperation to the DPRK's nuclear program. The initial plan was written and confirmed in November 2007, three months before the late former President Roh Moo-hyun stepped down, and was scheduled to provide the principles of the ROK's policy stance toward the DPRK until 2012. But the government began rewriting the framework in February 2008 after President Lee Myung-bak was sworn in.

Yonhap ("S. KOREA TO RESUME AID FOR N. KOREAN CHILDREN", Seoul, 2009/12/21) reported that the ROK plans to resume cash support that will be used to enhance the health of DPRK infants and children through U.N. agencies early next year, officials said on Monday. Unification Ministry spokesman Chun Hae-sung said at a press briefing the scope of the aid and other details are "still under consultation," but ministry sources expect millions of dollars will be pulled out of the ministry's inter-Korean cooperation fund for the assistance. Beneficiaries are likely to be the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization, both of which operate health care programs for those who are nutritionally at risk in the DPRK, they said.

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

7. DPRK Influenza

BBC News ("SOUTH KOREA SENDS FLU MEDICINE TO NORTH KOREA", 2009/12/18) reported that the ROK has sent medicine for swine flu to the DPRK. The shipment of Tamiflu and Relenza, worth \$15m and enough to treat 500,000 people, was taken over the border to Kaesong Friday in refrigerated trucks, the ROK unification ministry said. Officials say they believe the flu virus to be more widespread in the DPRK than reported so far and do not want to see it spread further with the onset of winter.

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

8. DPRK Economy

Joongang Ilbo ("THE NORTH'S SUBTERRANEAN COOKIE ECONOMY", Seoul, 2009/12/19) reported that at the Kaesong complex, each DPRK worker receives about two or three Choco Pies as a snack each day. Since they were first provided in May 2007, monthly consumption has quintupled to 2.5 million. An official there said, "At first, the workers were taking them home to feed their children or younger siblings." But today, people are taking Choco Pies to the underground market. "Choco Pie collectors have popped up [across the DPRK]," said an official at the Unification Ministry in Seoul. "In Sinuiju, a northern city near the Chinese border, there is even a retail market."

Chosun Ilbo ("PYONGYANG IN APARTMENT MODERNIZATION DRIVE", Seoul, 2009/12/21) reported that the DPRK is building new apartments with Western kitchen and bathrooms in Pyongyang, with glossy features advertising them in the illustrated magazine Choson. The DPRK is building 100,000 homes throughout Pyongyang by 2012. Kim Jong-il has hailed the apartments as "top-rate modern homes reflecting the party's intention and plans."

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

9. DPRK Human Rights

Korea Times (Kim Sue-young, "UN URGES NORTH KOREA TO IMPROVE HUMAN RIGHTS", Seoul, 2009/12/12) reported that the United Nations has renewed its resolution urging the DPRK to improve its human rights conditions, the ROK foreign ministry said Sunday. During the U.N. General Assembly in New York, 99 countries including the ROK, the United States and Japan endorsed the resolution, while 20 others, including the PRC and Malaysia, voted against it, a ministry spokesman said. The remaining 63 countries abstained. It is the fifth consecutive year the U.N. has issued the resolution calling on the DPRK to make improvements in regard to human rights.

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

10. Japanese Wives in DPRK

Yomiuri Shimbun ("HOPES FADE AS LETTERS DRY UP", Tokyo, 2009/12/21) reported that 93,340 Korean residents of Japan and their Japanese wives left Japan for DPRK under a repatriation program between 1959 and 1984. Since then, the fates of most of the 1,831 wives who sailed for the DPRK have become unknown; about 100 are thought to still be alive. But as the wives are getting on in years, their correspondence with their families in Japan has become intermittent--or stopped completely in some cases. Food shortages have stirred anxieties among the wives' families back in Japan.

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

11. DPRK Leadership

Donga Ilbo ("LEADING NK DAILY SHOWS MULTIPLE PHOTOS OF LEADER", Seoul, 2009/12/18) reported that the Rodong Shinmun showed an unprecedented number of photos of its leader Kim Jong Il in October and November, immediately before its surprise currency revaluation on November 30. His pictures once appeared in the daily more than 20 times in one day, but remained absent for a week from December 1, the day after the revaluation.

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

12. ROK Cyber Security

Agence France-Presse ("S. KOREA-US JOINT WAR PLANS HACKED", Seoul, 2009/12/18) reported that computer hackers who may be from the DPRK have gained access to a secret U.S.-ROK plan to defend the peninsula in case of war, the defense ministry said Friday. The hackers used an IP address in the PRC to access some military data related to Operation Plan 5027, a spokesman told AFP. "Authorities are trying to find whether North Korea was involved," he said, adding the leaked data contained crucial information such as slide and power point displays explaining the plan.

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

13. ROK Land Mine Removal

Yonhap ("1,300 LANDMINES CLEARED FROM AREAS BORDERING N.K. THIS YEAR", Seoul, 2009/12/21) reported that the ROK military said Monday it has removed some 1,300 land mines this year from the country's rural areas bordering the DPRK. In the operations that lasted from April to November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) mobilized 3,300 personnel to remove mines from a total of 100,000 square meters of land south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), it said in a release. JCS said it plans to clear 140,000 square meters of land next year.

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

14. ROK Military Procurements

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "S. KOREA PLANS TO DEVELOP LIGHT ATTACK HELICOPTER", Seoul, 2009/12/20) reported that the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) is in favor of developing a homegrown light attack helicopter under the Korea Attack Helicopter (KAH) program, multiple military sources said Sunday. At the same time, the agency plans to purchase foreign heavy attack helicopters under the AH-X initiative.

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

15. ROK Military

Korea Herald (Kim Ji-hyun, "DEFENSE MILITARY PRESSED TO INTEGRATE MILITARY ACADEMIES", Seoul, 2009/12/21) reported that the ROK government is pushing to integrate parts of the curriculum of the nation's three top military academies to help improve efficiency and combat ability, pressed by orders from the presidential office, according to defense sources Friday. "The plan at the moment is to combine the curriculum at these three schools so that cadets can take courses outside of their respective academies to expand their horizons, while also receiving credit for those courses," said Won Tae-jae, Defense Ministry spokesman.

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

16. ROK Climate Change

Korea Herald (Lee Sun-young, "KOREA PUSHES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE TARGET", Seoul, 2009/12/21) reported that the ROK government considers climate change a top priority along with economic growth and will take voluntary actions, President Lee Myung-bak said Monday. "If we can't avoid the (climate change) issue, we might just face it head-on and be a leader," Lee said. "One of the accomplishments of Korea at the meeting is that we remain a Non-Annex 1 country that has no obligatory emissions reduction target," Chung Rae-kwon, the ROK ambassador on climate change said. The Korea Federation for Environmental Movement, a Seoul-based civic group, however, said that the country might have missed a chance, by remaining in the Non-Annex 1 group, to take a fundamental shift in the way of living, doing business and running the country.

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

17. US Forces in Japan

Asahi Shimbun ("OKADA OPPOSES SHIPPING MARINES OUT", Tokyo, 2009/12/21) reported that Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada indicated his opposition over the weekend to removing all U.S. Marines from Japan. "The Marines are a necessary presence for Japan," Okada said. "If we are to expect the Marines to have a deterrent effect, it would not be possible to say they should leave Japan."

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

18. Japanese Politics

Reuters ("JAPAN GOVERNMENT SUPPORT SLIDES ON 'LACK OF LEADERSHIP'", Tokyo, 2009/12/21) reported that support for the government of Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has sunk in surveys issued on Monday and at the weekend. The most dramatic slide in support came in a poll by the Asahi newspaper, showing 48 percent of respondents backed the government, compared with 62 percent about a month ago. About 74 percent said that Hatoyama had failed to demonstrate leadership. The Mainichi newspaper showed support had fallen to 55 percent, down from 64 percent in November. But Hatoyama's troubles have not translated into good news for the opposition Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The Asahi said 42 percent backed the Democrats against 18 percent for the LDP.

Yomiuri Shimbun ("CABINET APPROVAL RATING DROPS TO 55%", Tokyo, 2009/12/20) reported that the approval rating for the Cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama dropped four percentage points to 55 percent in the latest Yomiuri Shimbun survey, while 51 percent of respondents opposed the government's decision not to resolve within the year the issue of relocating a U.S. airfield in Okinawa Prefecture. Conducted on Friday and Saturday, the most recent poll found the Cabinet's disapproval rating to be 33 percent, up four percentage points from the previous survey, which was held Dec. 4-6.

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

19. Japanese Influenza

Asahi Shimbun ("SWINE FLU FALLS BELOW WARNING LEVEL", Tokyo, 2009/12/19) reported that the number of patients treated per week in Japan for the H1N1 swine influenza has fallen below the warning level for the first time since late October, the National Institute of Infectious Diseases said Friday. An average of 27.39 flu patients sought treatment at about 5,000 medical institutions from Dec. 7 to 13. The figure was the second week of decline, following an average of 31.82 for Nov. 30 to Dec. 6. An estimated 1.32 million patients were treated in the latest reporting period, down about 180,000 from a week earlier.

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

20. Cross Strait Relations

Associated Press ("TAIWAN PROTESTS FLARE OVER VISIT OF CHINA ENVOY TO SIGN ACCORDS", Taichung, 2009/12/20) reported that tens of thousands of Taiwan opposition demonstrators marched in the central city of Taichung on Sunday, a day before the arrival of a senior PRC envoy, Chen Yunlin. The protesters chanted pro-independence slogans and waved anti-China banners to protest the visit by Chen. The Democratic Progressive Party sponsored the protest Sunday to press its message that President Ma Ying-jeou's signature policy of increasing economic links with Beijing is threatening the well-being of Taiwan and paving the way for a PRC takeover.

Associated Press (Christopher Bodeen, "CHINA ENVOY TELLS TAIWAN HE SEES MOVE TOWARD PEACE", Taichung, 2009/12/21) reported that PRC senior Taiwan envoy Chen Yunlin told his hosts Monday that Beijing wants to "move down the road of peace." Chen's statement in Taichung came amid heavy security, with police preventing several hundred protesters from besieging his hotel. Chen arrived in Taichung on Monday to discuss a wide-ranging free-trade agreement with Taiwanese officials.

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

21. PRC Ethnic Unrest

New York Times (Seth Mydans, "20 UIGHURS ARE DEPORTED TO CHINA ", Bangkok, 2009/12/19) reported that the Cambodian government on Saturday deported 20 members of the Uighur minority who had sought asylum. "They are going back to China," said an Interior Ministry spokesman, Lt. Gen. Khieu Sopheak. He said the Uighurs __ had been put on a special plane sent from China that left the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, on Saturday night.

Agence France-Presse (Suy Se, "ACTIVISTS CONDEMN CAMBODIA'S DEPORTATION OF UIGHURS TO CHINA", Phnom Penh, 2009/12/20) reported that rights activists expressed outrage Sunday at Cambodia's decision to deport to the PRC a group of 20 Muslim Uighurs who had sought refuge. "The Cambodian government has violated its responsibilities as a signatory to the 1951 (UN) Refugee Convention," President of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights Ou Virak told AFP on Sunday. "The biggest concern of all is that these 20 Uighurs will get tortured or silently executed once back home," he said.

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

22. PRC Climate Change

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA 'HIJACKED' CLIMATE SUMMIT: BRITISH MINISTER", London, 2009/12/21) reported that the PRC "hijacked" the Copenhagen summit by blocking a legally-binding treaty, Britain's climate change secretary Ed Miliband said Monday. "We did not get an agreement on 50 percent reductions in global emissions by 2050 or on 80 percent reductions by developed countries," Miliband wrote in The Guardian newspaper. "Both were vetoed by China, despite the support of a coalition of developed and the vast majority of developing countries."

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

23. PRC Internet

BBC News (Brian Wheeler, "CHINESE PROPOSAL TO METER INTERNET TRAFFIC", 2009/12/18) reported that the PRC wants to meter all internet traffic that passes through its borders. The move would require international agreement - but it is being discussed by the United Nations body in charge of internet standards. Andrea Servida, of the European Commission, told a House of Lords committee that the PRC could have a "hidden agenda" in wanting to monitor data flows. He suggested technical changes needed to charge everyone for internet traffic flowing through the PRC could undermine the web's founding principle of openness as well as raising security and stability concerns for all net users.

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

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