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CONTENTS

I. United States

1. US Delegation on DPRK Nuclear Complex
2. DPRK Plutonium Collection
3. US-Japan-ROK DPRK Discussions
4. Japan on DPRK Diplomacy
5. DPRK-PRC Diplomatic Relations
6. ROK on Bush State of the Union
7. Japan-DPRK Relations
8. Pritchard Visit to DPRK

I. United States

1. US Delegation on DPRK Nuclear Complex

Agence France-Presse ("NORTH KOREA DID NOT PROVE IT HAD NUCLEAR WEAPON : US SCIENTIST," Washington, 01/21/04) reported that a US scientist who toured a secretive DPRK nuclear complex said the DPRK did not prove it had made or could develop a nuclear bomb, but likely had the capacity to make weapons grade plutonium. But Dr. Siegfried Hecker suggested that US policymakers would be foolish to assume the DPRK could not produce nuclear weapons. Hecker, senior fellow of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, said during his first public testimony on his trip two weeks ago that the DPRK also denied US claims that it confessed to a US claim it had a uranium enrichment program. The US accusation sparked a nuclear crisis in October 2002 which has defied a drive to find a diplomatic solution. Since then, the DPRK has restarted a five megawatt nuclear reactor at its notorious Yongbyon complex and is piling up plutonium at the rate of six kilogrammes a year, Hecker told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But a larger 50 megawatt reactor at the complex, frozen under a now ruptured 1994 anti-nuclear deal with the US, was in a state of disrepair and clearly inoperable, he reported. Hecker, part of two unofficial government delegations to the DPRK, said he was shown what appeared to be a sample of

reprocessed plutonium, a key ingredient for nuclear weapons. DPRK officials described the substance as evidence they had a nuclear "deterrent." "At Yongbyon they demonstrated they most likely had the capability to make plutonium metal," he said. "However, I saw nothing and spoke to no one who could convince me that they could build a nuclear device with that metal, and that they could weaponize such a device into a delivery vehicle." Later he told reporters: "It would be unreasonable to assume, and also just not smart to assume, they cannot make a rudimentary weapon," "All observations I was able to make are consistent with the sample being plutonium," he said, but stressed that without scientific instruments he could not assess whether the substance came from a recent reprocessing operation which DPRK officials said was completed by June last year.

2. DPRK Plutonium Collection

Agence France-Presse ("NORTH KOREA COLLECTING PLUTONIUM AT NUCLEAR COMPLEX: US EXPERT," Washington, 01/21/04) reported that the DPRK is accumulating plutonium that could be used to make a nuclear weapon from a reactor that has been restarted at its controversial Yongbyon research complex, a top US atomic expert warned. But the DPRK has denied it has a highly enriched uranium program that could enable the faster production of nuclear weapons, according to Siegfried Hecker, an atomic expert who was part of an unofficial US delegation that went to Yongbyon this month. He said in comments prepared for an address to the US Congress that a small experimental reactor at the complex was working again after North Korea ended a freeze on its nuclear development. "The five-megawatt reactor has been restarted; it appears to be operating smoothly, providing heat and electricity, also accumulating approximately six kilograms (13.2 pounds) of plutonium per year in its spent fuel rods," said Hecker, a senior fellow at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Hecker confirmed that the spent fuel pond at Yongbyon is now empty. "The approximately 8,000 fuel rods have been moved," he said Wednesday. The fuel rods were estimated to contain between 25 and 30 kilograms (55 to 66 pounds) of plutonium. "We could not definitively substantiate that claim," said Hecker. But he said laboratory staff had showed "the requisite facility, equipment and technical expertise and they appear to have the capacity" to extract the plutonium. US intelligence experts believe that stock could provide Pyongyang with the ingredients for up to six nuclear bombs. The Central Intelligence Agency says the DPRK may already have one or two crude atomic weapons. A top DPRK official denied during the visit that the secretive state has a highly enriched uranium (HEU) program. DPRK Vice Minister Kim Gye Gwan rejected international suspicions about the DPRK nuclear programme during talks with Jack Pritchard, Hecker said. "Vice Minister Kim Gye Gwan stated that the DPRK had no HEU programme." "Upon further questioning, he stated that the DPRK had chosen the plutonium path to a deterrent." The minister added that the DPRK "had no facilities, equipment or scientists dedicated to a HEU program."

3. US-Japan-ROK DPRK Discussions

Agence France-Presse ("US, JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA CONFER ON NORTH KOREA," Washington, 01/20/04) reported that the US, Japan and the ROK opened two days of talks on the latest diplomatic moves to end the DPRK nuclear crisis, overshadowed by revelations about a trip to Pyongyang by a top US nuclear scientist. The State Department's top East Asia policymaker James Kelly hosted bilateral talks with his counterparts from Seoul and Tokyo, ahead of an informal three-way session on Thursday. The three allies coordinate closely on policy towards the DPRK, and were likely to discuss latest developments in the PRC's drive to convene a new round of six-nation crisis talks after a first round made little headway in August. The ROK was represented in Washington by deputy foreign minister Lee Soo-Hyuk, while Japan sent its director general of Asian and Oceanian

Affairs Mitoji Yabunaka, the State Department said. The US revealed this month it had made a rare direct call to the DPRK in a bid to convene a second round of the six-party talks. The DPRK offered recently to freeze its nuclear weapons drive in return for concessions, including an end to US sanctions and a resumption of energy aid. The US is holding out for a commitment from Pyongyang to scrap its nuclear program.

4. Japan on DPRK Diplomacy

Reuters ("JAPAN SAYS NORTH KOREA SENDING POSITIVE SIGNALS," Tokyo, 01/21/04) reported that the DPRK has started to send positive signals about key issues including its nuclear weapons program, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi said on Wednesday. "I believe North Korea has sent several positive signals recently," a Japanese official quoted Kawaguchi as telling ROK President Roh Moo-Hyun's national security adviser Ra Jong-yil in Tokyo. Kawaguchi made the remarks ahead of talks in Washington on Wednesday between senior diplomats from the US, Japan and the ROK on the DPRK's nuclear ambitions. The DPRK offered this month to freeze its nuclear activities, a move seen by the US and others as signaling that the DPRK was preparing for talks. Ra told Kawaguchi that he was not optimistic that the DPRK would soon agree to dismantle its nuclear weapons program in a "complete, irreversible and verifiable" way, the Japanese official said. In what could be another positive sign, the DPRK has unofficially offered to send to Japan the children of Japanese nationals whom the DPRK's agents abducted decades ago.

5. DPRK-PRC Diplomatic Relations

Korea Times ("NK'S KIM MEETS PRC DELEGATION," 01/21/04) reported that the DPRK's National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong-il Monday recently met with a visiting PRC Communist Party delegation. "Chairman Kim Jong-il met with the delegation of the International Liaison Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China led by Wang Jiarui, alternate member of the party's Central Committee and head of the department, reported the Norths state-run Korean Central News Agency on Tuesday. Accompanying the DPRK leader were Ji Jae-ryong, vice department director of the Norths ruling Workers Party and Wu Donghe, PRC ambassador to Pyongyang. The PRC delegation is the first foreign visitors Chairman Kim has received this year. But the KCNA did not say whether the six-nation meeting was brought up as an issue during talks, only mentioning that "talks were held in a warm and amicable atmosphere without elaborating further. The head of the PRC delegation also delivered Lunar New Years Day greetings by President Hu Jintaro to Chairman Kim.

6. ROK on Bush State of the Union

Yonhap ("S KOREA SAYS BUSH'S SPEECH SHOWS NEED FOR CONTINUED TALKS ON N KOREA," Seoul, 01/21/04) reported that the ROK's Foreign Ministry said Wednesday (21 January) that US President George W. Bush's State of the Union Address underlined the need for continued talks to resolve issues surrounding North Korea's alleged nuclear weapons development programme. Officials at the ministry said Bush's address reiterated the US position of not allowing rogue states to acquire weapons of mass destruction. They also said the US president's remarks about the need for dissimilar approaches for different countries showed Washington was not looking at the "Iraqi example" to settle its outstanding disputes with Pyongyang. The State of the Union address clearly indicated that the Bush administration wants North Korea to take part in six-way talks and that further vacillating on the matter is not desirable," said a foreign ministry insider. The US president cited the DPRK and Iran, whose regimes have been accused of harbouring nuclear ambitions, as

countries that should be prevented from developing the world's most dangerous weapons.

7. Japan-DPRK Relations

Agence France-Presse ("NORTH KOREA ACCUSES JAPAN OF PLANNING ATTACK, SLAMS MISSILE DEFENCE PLAN," 01/21/04) reported that the DPRK has attacked Japan's moves to build up its missile defence system as part of a planned nuclear strike against the DPRK. The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said "Japan is now rounding off its nuclear weaponization at its final phase" and was capable of producing "thousands of nuclear warheads" overnight. "This can not be construed (as anything other) than part of its plan to mount a preemptive nuclear attack on the DPRK," KCNA said. Japan last month decided to adopt ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems to protect itself from emerging terrorist threats, weapons of mass destruction and DPRK missiles. Japan will introduce a US-developed system for now and continue to conduct joint research with the US to improve its missile defenses, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda said in a statement.

8. Pritchard Visit to DPRK

New York Times (Jack Pritchard, "WHAT I SAW IN NORTH KOREA," Washington, 01/21/04) carried an Op-Ed that read "Time is not on the American side," Kim Gye Gwan, vice foreign minister of the DPRK, told me a few weeks ago. "As time passes, our nuclear deterrent continues to grow in quantity and quality." Those words are an indictment of United States intelligence as well as a potential epitaph on the Bush administration's failed policy in the DPRK. On Jan. 8, DPRK officials gave an unofficial American delegation, of which I was a member, access to the building in Yongbyon where about 8,000 spent fuel rods had once been safeguarded. We discovered that all 8,000 rods had been removed. Whether they have been reprocessed for weapons-grade plutonium, as Pyongyang claims, is almost irrelevant. American intelligence believed that most if not all the rods remained in storage, giving policymakers a false sense that time was on their side as they rebuffed DPRK requests for serious dialogue and worked laboriously to devise a multilateral approach to solving the rapidly escalating crisis. But events of the last several years show that this approach is not working. In December 2002 the DPRK was suspected of having one or two nuclear weapons that it had acquired before agreeing in 1994 to freeze its known nuclear program and to allow it to be monitored. More than a year later, the DPRK may have quadrupled its arsenal of nuclear weapons. During the intervening period, the Bush administration has relied on intelligence that dismissed DPRK claims that it restarted its nuclear program at Yongbyon with the express purpose of reprocessing previously sealed and monitored spent fuel to extract plutonium to make a "nuclear deterrent." Now there are about 8,000 spent fuel rods missing - evidence that work on such a deterrent may have begun. It is just the most recent failure in a string of serious DPRK-related intelligence failures. When the DPRK claimed in 1998 to have launched a three-stage rocket to put a communications satellite into orbit, American intelligence initially denied the rocket had this capacity - and then, days later, confirmed the DPRK claim. That same year United States intelligence insisted that Pyongyang had embarked on a secret underground project to duplicate its frozen nuclear weapons program. Eight months later, an American inspection team visited the underground site to find that American intelligence was dead wrong. Then there was the intelligence in the summer of 2002 that indicated the DPRK regime was on the brink of collapse. That reporting was later recalled as faulty - but not before the damage was done. American policy in the DPRK is hardly better than American intelligence. At best it can be described only as amateurish. At worst, it is a failed attempt to lure American allies down a path that is not designed to resolve the crisis diplomatically but to lead to the failure and ultimate isolation of the DPRK in hopes that its government will collapse. Having a discussion with the DPRK does not mean abandoning the multilateral framework agreed to in 1994. Nor does direct communications mean capitulating to

DPRK demands. It simply means serious exploration of what is possible and acceptable to all parties. This administration must step out from behind the PRC's diplomatic skirt and take the lead in resolving this crisis before Pyongyang creates a real nuclear deterrent. As it is now, the DPRK is calling the shots. The Bush administration needs to reassert itself - but responsibly. It should appoint a DPRK policy coordinator of the stature and integrity of former Defense Secretary William Perry to bring sanity and adult supervision to the administration's infighting. I take President Bush at his word that he desires a peaceful and diplomatic solution to this crisis. He deserves someone who can articulate his vision for the Korean Peninsula and make policy decisions while holding off the worst impulses of some within the administration. I am concerned that the next round of six-party talks will fail and Pyongyang will withdraw from the diplomatic process. It may then declare that it has developed all the nuclear weapons it needs and that it does not intend to make any more. The PRC, the ROK and Russia (and perhaps Japan) may well accept this new status quo, arguing that the actual threat is minimal and further nuclear activity has been suspended. And it is easy to see why this new status quo would appeal to them, given the instability that could result if the worst-case scenario of United States policy - which is to say, isolation, sanctions and possible military confrontation - comes to pass. The fragile multilateral coalition on which the United States is relying would dissolve. The result would be a region even more dangerous than it is today - and America and Asia are even less secure now than they were a year ago. How many nuclear weapons does the DPRK have to make before this administration gets serious about its policy in East Asia?

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.

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