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I. Napsnet

1. DPRK Nuclear Program

New York Times (Helene Cooper, "U.S. SEES STALLING BY NORTH KOREA ON NUCLEAR PACT", Washington, 2008/01/19) reported that a debate is under way within the Bush administration over how long it can exercise patience with the DPRK without jeopardizing the fulfillment of the nuclear deal. The debate has fractured along familiar lines, with a handful of national security hawks in Vice President Dick Cheney's office and at the State Department arguing for a more confrontational approach with Pyongyang. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill has argued that the United States should continue a more restrained approach, and still appears to have support from Mr. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. "Some people make the argument that we're just pursuing a policy of talks that go nowhere," said one administration official with knowledge of the debate within the administration. "People lambaste the six-party process, and sure, it offers no refuge for those in need of instant gratification," Hill said in an interview. "But when asked for alternatives" to the nuclear pact, "even the noisiest critics fall silent."

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2. DPRK on US Military

Korea Herald ("NORTH KOREA SLAMS 'RECKLESS' US JET DEPLOYMENT", Seoul, 2008/01/21) reported that the DPRK on Sunday criticised a US deployment of military jets to the ROK, saying the move jeopardised nuclear disarmament moves and risked "tension and war," according to AFP. A spokesman for the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland told the official Korean Central News Agency, "Such reckless moves for military confrontation clearly show who is scuttling the peaceful solution to the nuclear issue of the Korean peninsula and sparking off tension and war." The US military has confirmed plans for training manoeuvres but describes them as routine.

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3. Inter-Korean Rail Link

BBC News ("N KOREA SUSPENDS SOUTH RAIL LINKS", Seoul, 2008/01/21) reported that the DPRK has postponed inter-Korean talks on improving rail links. Working-level officials were due to meet to discuss issues including the newly-launched cross-border cargo link, but Pyongyang asked for a postponement, citing "time constraints", officials in Seoul said. The DPRK asked for the two-day talks to be suspended because "it is the start of the year and there are a few things to prepare", the ROK Unification Ministry said.

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4. DPRK Population

Chosun Ilbo ("N.KOREA SAYS POPULATION HIT 23.6 MIL. IN 2004", Seoul, 2008/01/21) reported that the DPRK's population reached 23,612,000 in 2004, according to a 2007 almanac released by the Korean Central News Agency on Sunday. According to the yearbook, the country's population grew by about 1.5 million, or around 200,000 per year, from 22,114,000 in 1996. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency estimated the DPRK's population in 2004 at 22,697,553.

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5. US-ROK Relations

Korea Times (Yoon Won-sup, "ENVOYS VISITING US, RUSSIA", Seoul, 2008/01/21) reported that Chung Mong-joon, the special envoy of ROK President-elect Lee Myung-bak, arrived in Washington Monday to explain foreign and other policies of the incoming government. Chung will meet with senior U.S. officials in Washington and financiers in New York. He will also deliver a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush from Lee, but a Chung-Bush meeting has not been scheduled yet, according to Lee's transition team. Chung will discuss ways of improving bilateral alliance, ratification of the ROK-U.S. free trade agreement (FTA) and the ROK's entry into the U.S. visa waiver program with U.S. officials. He will also help arrange summit talks in March in Washington.

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6. ROK Military

Chosun Ilbo ("AEGIS SHIPS 'TO BE EQUIPPED WITH NEW INTERCEPT MISSILES'", Seoul, 2008/01/21) reported that the ROK Defense Ministry apparently plans to equip the Navy's 7,600-ton-class Aegis vessels with the newest-type American-made SM-6 missiles. The development of the SM-6 has not been finished; once it is, some 100 of them will be deployed on ROK naval vessels by around 2012. A senior source at the Defense Ministry said Sunday, the ROK plans "to deploy SM-6 long-range sea-to-air missiles on the King Sejong-class destroyer, which we launched last year, and two other Aegis destroyers that will be built. A lot of progress has been made in Seoul-Washington talks on their purchase." The SM-6 missile reportedly has a range of 320 to 400 km and a maximum intercept altitude of about 30 km.

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7. ROK Intelligence Leak

Korea Herald (Song Sang-ho, "SPY CHIEF SCRUTINIZED OVER DISCLOSURE OF 'STATE SECRET'", Seoul, 2008/01/21) reported that State prosecutors Monday launched an investigation into Kim Man-bok, head of the National Intelligence Service, who leaked excerpts from a confidential meeting with his DPRK counterpart. "Based on our analysis of the content of the documents and how they were leaked, we tentatively determined that the leaked information is an official secret," said Shin Joong-Dae, a senior prosecutor at the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office. "The focus of our investigation lies on whether Kim contravened the law regarding disclosure of official secrets. We will piece together all circumstantial evidence to determine whether the

leakage constitutes a crime," he added.

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8. ROK-Taiwan Relations

Korea Times (Han Sang-hee, "FORMER PRESIDENT TO VISIT TAIWAN", Seoul, 2008/01/21) reported that former ROK President Kim Young-sam will leave for Taiwan Thursday to attend a meeting of former pro-democracy leaders of the world, including former Polish President Lech Walesa. During his five-day stay, Kim will also exchange views on expanding bilateral relations with President Chen Shui-bian and other ranking Taiwanese officials.

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9. Taiwan Politics

Associated Press (Peter Enav, "TAIWANESE QUESTION INDEPENDENCE PUSH", Taipei, 2008/01/20) reported that the opposition Nationalist Party's landslide victory in legislative elections in Taiwan this month reflects the feeling among many voters that President Chen Shui-bian is pushing too hard, too fast, for formal and permanent separation from the PRC. With the local economy struggling, many Taiwanese are cashing in on the mainland's economic boom, moving away to the PRC to try to further their careers. Taiwan's economy is growing at about half the rate of the PRC's, which has more than tripled in size since Chen took office.

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10. Japanese Assistance to Iraq

Asahi Shimbun ("JAPAN TO PROVIDE RECONSTRUCTION LOANS TO IRAQ", Tokyo, 2008/01/21) reported that the Japanese government will provide about 182.7 billion yen in yen loans, part of the largest assistance package after that of the United States, to assist Iraq's reconstruction efforts, sources said. The loans will fund mainly infrastructure projects, such as modifying thermal power stations and petroleum refineries, in hopes of improving the Iraqi people's lives amid growing security in the country, the sources said.

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11. Japanese A-Bomb Victims

Asahi Shimbun ("STANDARDS EASED ON A-BOMB DISEASES", Tokyo, 2008/01/19) reported that the Japanese health ministry has come up with new standards that will make it much easier for atomic bomb survivors to be certified as victims of radiation-related diseases. Ministry officials expect the number of those being certified as radiation disease patients will increase tenfold to about 1,800 people a year. Currently, out of 250,000 people who have received official hibakusha health cards as atomic bomb survivors, only 2,200 of them have been certified as suffering from radiation-related diseases, making them eligible for about 140,000 yen a month in special medical benefits.

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