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I. United States

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1. Four-Party Peace Talks

The Associated Press ("N. KOREA BLAMES U.S. FOR PROBLEMS," Tokyo, 03/24/98) reported that, in a statement broadcast Monday from the official Korean Central News Agency, the DPRK blamed the US for the deadlock in four-party peace talks and accused it of trying to control the agenda for negotiations. The statement quoted an unidentified ministry spokesman as saying that the US is using the talks "to justify the outsiders' interference in the internal affairs of the Korean nation."

US Deputy State Department Spokesman James Foley ("STATE DEPARTMENT NOON BRIEFING," USIA Transcript, 03/23/98) stated that US negotiators at the four-party peace talks proposed various mechanisms based on the already-agreed upon agenda to move the dialogue toward productive

exchanges on concrete confidence-building measures. He added, however, "Unfortunately, the North Koreans were not prepared to consider pragmatic steps forward. The North Koreans insisted that the negotiations on the withdrawal of US forces from Korea and a separate peace treaty be placed on the agenda." Foley stated that while the US is willing to exchange views on any subject, the US troops on the Korean Peninsula, "vis- a-vis North Korea's 1.2 million-member army are not, in fact, a cause of tension." He argued that the troops have helped maintain peace and stability for the past 45 years. He stated, "Their presence in Korea is, and will be, determined by the US and the Republic of Korea on the basis of our mutual security alliance. It is not a subject for negotiation with any other nation." He added that, despite the lack of results thus far, the US is "not pessimistic about the long-run." He concluded, "We expect this process, however difficult, to continue because it's so important to the four parties represented there."

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2. Reform of ROK Intelligence Agency

The Associated Press (Sang-Hun Choe, "S. KOREA FIRES SPY AGENCY OFFICIALS," Seoul, 03/24/98) reported that ROK government sources said Tuesday that 24 of the 38 top officials of the Agency for National Security Planning were fired on Monday, and that up to 1,000 agents, or about 10 percent of the agency's employees, will be forced to quit later this week. Earlier, President Kim Dae-jung was quoted as saying by his spokesman, Park Ji-won, "My aim is to make sure that the agency will not be involved in domestic politics." Meanwhile, prosecutors said Tuesday that they were looking into allegations that politicians from both the ruling and opposition parties might have tried to conspire with the DPRK to smear opponents' campaigns.

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3. New ROK Ambassador to US

The Associated Press ("SOUTH KOREA NAMES U.S. AMBASSADOR," Seoul, 03/24/98) reported that ROK Foreign Ministry officials said Tuesday that former prime minister Lee Hong-koo has been chosen by President Kim Dae-jung as the new ROK ambassador to the US, replacing Park Kun-woo. Lee is currently a member of the National Assembly from the Grand National Party. He also served from 1988 to 1990 as the unification minister, and then as ambassador to London.

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4. PRC Military Buildup

The AP-Dow Jones News Service ("TAIPEI SAYS CHINA CAPABLE OF LAUNCHING ATTACK AGAINST TAIWAN," Taipei, 03/24/98) reported that the Taiwan Defense Ministry said Tuesday that the PRC has increased its military strength in the coastal provinces and is now capable of enforcing "a partial or total blockade." According to a defense white paper issued by the ministry, the PRC also plans to build a deep-water port in Hong Kong that could serve as a base to reinforce troops in case of a war in the South China Sea. The paper said that, in the past two years, the PRC has modernized its armed forces, created several units of shock troops, and conducted maneuvers to prepare for an attack against Taiwan. It added, "China has shifted the core of its military construction work to its southeast coast, significantly boosting its threat to our national defense." The PRC also could send up to 59 transport planes to land two regiments of paratroops on Taiwan, it said. However, the report stated, "the most threatening military move the Communists could take would be firing its [sic] Dongfeng 15 and Dongfeng 21 missiles for a direct attack at our major political, economical [sic] and military establishments." It alleged that PRC military spending is in fact three times the

announced figure of 80 billion yuan. The report said that Taiwan, in contrast, is seeking to establish a "small but strong and elite" defense force, adding that the 450,000-strong armed forces will be reduced to 400,000 when the 10-year modernization plan is completed in 2001.

II. Republic of Korea

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1. DPRK Domestic Economy

A Hong Kong newspaper reported on March 23 that a miniature market economy is forming in the DPRK. The paper indicated that, although at a minimum level, famine stricken DPRK citizens are bartering local products for food in DPRK-PRC border areas, thus establishing a primitive form of market economy. (Yonhap News, "MARKET ECONOMY IN THE DPRK," Hong Kong, 03/23/98)

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2. US Forces in the ROK

The US State Department announced on March 23 that the retrieval of US armed forces in the ROK is a non-negotiable issue. Department Spokesman James Polly emphasized that, contrary to the DPRK's allegations, the US forces have contributed greatly to maintaining peace and security in the Korean peninsula. (Joongang Ilbo, "US FORCES IN KOREA, UNCOMPROMISABLE," 03/24/98)

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3. ROK-Japan Relations

Japanese press reported March 23, quoting Japanese Foreign Minister Keizo Obuchi, that the ROK and Japan may soon revive regular inter-ministerial talks. Obuchi, meeting Japanese reporters in Seoul March 22 after his weekend visit to ROK, said the two countries need a channel of contact so that ministers from the two countries can "freely exchange opinions." Obuchi's proposal received a positive reply from ROK acting Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil. (Korea Times, "SEOUL, TOKYO LIKELY TO RESUME REGULAR CABINET MINISTERS' TALKS," 03/24/98)

III. Correction

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1. Nautilus DPRK Energy Project

An item in the ROK Section of the March 19 Daily Report said that the Nautilus Institute plans to build a 15 kilowatt wind power plant in the DPRK. The actual generating capacity of the plant will be 8.9 kilowatts.

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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