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I. NAPSNet

1. Six Party Talks

Reuters (Arshad Mohammed, "U.S. DIPLOMAT TO VISIT NORTH KOREA THIS WEEK", Washington, 2008/01/28) reported that a US diplomat will visit Pyongyang this week to try to advance a stalled deal under which the DPRK promised to disclose all its nuclear programs and eventually abandon them, a US official said. The U.S. official, who asked not to be named, said Sung Kim, the director of the State Department's Office of Korean Affairs, was expected to make stops in Seoul on Tuesday and in Beijing on Wednesday before visiting Pyongyang on Thursday. "He is leaving today for six-party consultations in Seoul, Beijing and Pyongyang on how to move the six-party process forward," the U.S. official said.

Associated Press (Kwang-tae Kim, "US DIPLOMAT PRESSES NUCLEAR DEAL", Incheon, 2008/01/29) reported that Sung Kim, head of the US State Department's Korea desk, said he'll press the DPRK to quickly provide a full accounting of its weapons programs. "The requirement is for a complete and correct declaration," he said after arriving for meetings with ROK officials. Kim will stop Wednesday in the PRC before heading Thursday to the DPRK for a visit expected to last up to three days. Meanwhile, PRC Communist Party envoy Wang Jiarui departed Tuesday for the DPRK, the official Xinhua News Agency said. "We hope the parties can remain patient and continue to work hard to implement the relevant agreements," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu told a regularly scheduled briefing.

Yonhap (Lee Chi-dong, "FM SONG OPPOSES SEPARATE BODY TO HANDLE N.KOREA", Seoul, 2008/01/29) reported that ROK Foreign Minister Song Ming-soon Tuesday cautioned the next government against attempting to form a trilateral consultation group with the U.S. and Japan that may undermine the six-party talks. "Any subgroup-level cooperation among the countries concerned should proceed in such a way to be compatible with the progress in the six-party talks," Song said in his English speech at a college forum. He added a new group that may disrupt the nuclear talks is "not advisable." "The process is like a marathon," he said. "there is a 'gap of mutual trust' among participating nations. We need some time and the art of diplomacy."

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2. US Policy Toward the DPRK

Agence France Presse (Lachlan Carmichael, "BUSH TEAM TRIES TO KEEP LID ON FRUSTRATION OVER NKOREA: EXPERTS", Washington, 2008/01/26) reported that the Bush administration is trying to keep a lid on growing frustration over faltering talks to rid the DPRK of nuclear weapons as criticism surfaces from hardliners in the wings, experts say. Though President George W. Bush's six-country diplomatic strategy still had broad support, the public criticism exposed doubts over where it was leading, according to non-proliferation experts who favor US engagement with Pyongyang. "I thought the administration is getting a little nervous," David Albright, "What I have seen so far is Bush is committed (to the diplomatic strategy) but they (in the administration) know North Korea has to make some concessions and it's not doing that," he told AFP.

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3. DPRK-US Relations

Korea Times ("NK CALLS FOR PEACE TREATY WITH US", 2008/01/28) reported that the DPRK on Saturday called for an official end to the Korean War through a peace treaty with the United States, and demanded that the U.S. drop its hard-line stance toward the DPRK. "In order to ease military tension and secure a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, the U.S. should move toward a peace treaty at an earlier date," the Rodong Sinmun, the organ of the Workers' Party, said in a commentary. However, the ROK's President-elect Lee Myung-bak opposes any talks on officially ending the Korean War until the DPRK completely dismantles its nuclear weapons program.

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4. ROK Policy Toward the DPRK

Reuters ("S.KOREA'S ROH APPEALS TO SAVE NORTH-SOUTH MINISTRY", Seoul, 2008/01/28) reported that the ROK's outgoing president went on national TV on Monday to make a last ditch appeal to block plans by his successor to axe several ministries including the Unification Ministry, responsible for dealing with the DPRK. "Merging these ministries will mean impairing the philosophy and values of this government. That's why I've talked about a reconsideration," Roh told a news conference. Roh urged the liberal-dominated parliament to block Lee's plans and said he could veto any legislation to streamline government that lands on his desk before he leaves office.

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5. ROK-DPRK-Russia Economic Relations

RIA Novosti ("SEOUL INTERESTED IN EAST SIBERIA DEVELOPMENT WITH RUSSIA, N.KOREA", Moscow, 2008/01/23) reported that the ROK is to try to involve Pyongyang in a joint cooperation project with Moscow on the development of east Siberia, a special envoy for the ROK president said. Lee Jae-oh, who arrived in Russia last Saturday, delivered a letter to the Russian president from President Lee Myung-bak on Monday via Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs adviser. "If we unite North Korea's workforce, Russia's resources and capital and [South] Korean technology than we can achieve tremendous and long-lasting results in the development of east Siberia," Lee Jae-oh said.

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6. DPRK-Russian Relations

Korea Herald ("MOSCOW, PYONGYANG DISCUSS RAIL PROJECT", 2008/01/28) reported that a Russian delegation arrived in the DPRK to discuss a joint project to rebuild a cross-border rail link, the DPRK's state media said. The delegation will discuss providing power to the northeastern port of Rajin, the official KCNA said. "Both sides will focus on discussing the issue electricity for the Khasan-Rajin railway and Rajin Port," it said. Russian officials have visited the DPRK to discuss modernizing the 55-kilometer line between Rajin and Russia's Khasan. Rajin is also referred to as Najin in the ROK. A Russian railway spokesman told AFP last week that a preliminary agreement had been reached with the DPRK on renovating the railway section, while the DPRK had yet to respond to Russia's proposal to build a cargo terminal in Rajin.

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7. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation

Bernama ("TOURS TO NORTH KOREA'S INDUSTRIAL PARK RESUME: OFFICIAL", 2008/01/28) reported that a tourism programme to an inter-Korean industrial complex in the DPRK's western border city of Kaesong will resume this week, Yonhap news agency quoted a ROK government official as saying. The DPRK opens the industrial complex to ROK tourists during the year, but temporarily halts the tours at year-end because of the need to develop business plans for new year. ROK tourists will visit the industrial complex on Tuesday, the first group this year, the official said.

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8. US-ROK Security Alliance

Yonhap (Lee Dong-min, "U.S. COMMANDER SEES OPTIMISM IN KOREA", Washington, 2008/01/28) reported that the top U.S. commander for the Pacific expressed cautious optimism about the prospects for peace on the Korean Peninsula despite the DPRK's nuclear intransigence. Conversations among members of the six-party talks and intelligence "give us cause to be... hopeful, very cautiously hopeful, for a change in the security situation on the Korean Peninsula," said Adm. Timothy Keating. He said US forces in the ROK, at one time as high as 37,000, will remain steady at between 25,000 and 28,000 after the planned transfer of wartime operation control to the ROK in 2012. Calling the transfer a "very big deal," Keating reaffirmed that the number of US troops in the ROK represent a "formidable set of capabilities."

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9. ROK-US Relations

Donga Ilbo ("UNPRECEDENTED GESTURE OF FAVOR FROM WASHINGTON ", 2008/01/28) reported that the U.S. House of Representatives is preparing for a resolution congratulating President-elect Lee Myung-bak's election victory. Congressman Edward Royce (R-Cal.) on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs told reporters at his office that he would introduce a resolution to the committee to celebrate Lee's victory and the advancement of democracy in the ROK. The resolution also contains the American hope for a more consolidated alliance with the ROK. It is very unusual for

both the House of Representatives and the Senate to try to pass resolutions to congratulate a foreign leader on the election victory and to deliver wishes for better relations prior to the inauguration.

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10. ROK-EU Trade Relations

Korea Times (Ryu Jin, "S. KOREA, EU SPAR OVER `RULES OF ORIGIN'", 2008/01/28) reported that the ROK and the European Union began a new round of talks for a free trade agreement (FTA) at the Shilla Hotel in Seoul Monday, this time focusing largely on the "rules of origin," which has been one of the sticking points in the past negotiations. The talks have been deadlocked by what the Europeans see as Seoul's protective stance toward some industries (such as automotive) and what the ROK described as the EU's high standards. "We are going to focus on the rules of origin in this round of talks," an ROK negotiator said on condition of anonymity. "We hope that we can reach an agreement and meet halfway with the EU."

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11. Japan Missile Defense Program

Reuters (Tetsushi Kajimoto, "JAPAN TO BOOST DEFENSE AGAINST CRUISE MISSILE: PAPER", Tokyo, 2008/01/28) reported that Japan is planning to beef up its defense against cruise missiles in response to the PRC's growing air strike capabilities, the Yomiuri newspaper reported. Japan has been lagging in efforts to counter cruise missile attacks while focusing on a ballistic missile defense system due to threats from the DPRK, it said. The defense Ministry is now set to increase the number of aircraft equipped with airborne warning and control systems and develop advanced long-range surface-to-air missiles to boost its ability to counter cruise missile attacks, the Yomiuri said.

The Associated Press (Eric Talmadge, "JAPAN, US RUSH FOR ANTI-MISSILE SHIELD", Misawa Air Base, 2008/01/28) reported that in a multibillion-dollar experiment, Japan and the US are erecting the world's most complex ballistic missile defense shield, a project that is changing the security balance in Asia and has deep implications for Washington's efforts to pursue a similar strategy in Europe, where the idea has been stalled by the lack of willing partners. "Japan is one of our strongest allies in the ballistic missile defense arena," said Brig. Gen. John E. Seward, the deputy commanding general of operations for the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command.

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12. US-PRC Military Relations

Agence France Presse ("US-CHINA DEVELOPING BETTER MILITARY TIES: US ADMIRAL", Washington, 2008/01/28) reported that the United States and PRC are developing better ties despite a recent row over the port visits of US ships, the head of the US armed forces in the Asia-Pacific said. "The sense I got is that they didn't want to be confrontational," Admiral Timothy Keating told reporters, after a visit to the PRC this month. "I am not as concerned today as I was before ... We think we are developing a better understanding of them." He added he had urged his PRC counterparts to improve communications by agreeing to a US proposal to install a telephone hotline between the two militaries.

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13. PRC, Russia on Weaponization of Space

Reuters (Stephanie Nebehay, "CHINA, RUSSIA TO OFFER TREATY TO BAN ARMS IN SPACE", Geneva, 2008/01/28) reported that the PRC and Russia will submit a joint proposal next month for an international treaty to ban the deployment of weapons in outer space, a senior Russian arms negotiator said. Valery Loshchinin, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations-sponsored Conference on Disarmament, said the draft treaty would be presented to the 65-member forum on February 12. Regarding the Sino-Russian draft, he said: "We see nothing in the new proposal to change the current U.S. position." "Additional binding arms control agreements are simply not a viable tool for enhancing the long-term space security interests of the United States or its allies," Mahley said.

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14. PRC Protest

Washington Post (Maureen Fan, "SHANGHAI'S MIDDLE CLASS LAUNCHES QUIET, METICULOUS REVOLT", Shanghai, 2008/01/27) reported that bundled against the cold, the businessman made his way down the steps. Coming toward him in blue mittens was a middle-aged woman. "Do you know that we're going to take a stroll this weekend?" she whispered, using the latest euphemism for the unofficial protests that have unnerved authorities in Shanghai over the past month. Behind her, protest banners streamed from the windows of high-rise apartment blocks, signs of middle-class discontent over a planned extension of the city's magnetic levitation, or maglev, train through residential neighborhoods. The sudden "strolls" by thousands of office workers, company managers, young families and the elderly in this sleek financial hub are the latest chapter in a quiet middle-class battle against government officials.

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15. PRC Energy Supply

The Financial Times (Richard McGregor and Tom Mitchell, "COAL SHORTAGES PUT PRESSURE ON BEIJING", Beijing and Hong Kong, 2008/01/28) reported that an acute coal shortage left the PRC suffering its worst power crisis in years as unseasonably large snowfalls saw hundreds of thousands stranded when they tried to travel to their families for the lunar new year holiday. About half of the PRC's 31 provinces and regions have been hit by "brownouts", or voltage reductions, caused by Beijing's attempt to reimpose and tighten price controls on commodities including coal and oil. Beijing is using old-fashioned price controls in an effort to stop food inflation, which has pushed the consumer price index to an 11-year high, from spreading to the rest of the economy.

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II. ROK Report

16. ROK-US Alliance

Kookmin Ilbo (Lee Dong-jae, "ROK NAVal OFFICER DEPLOYED TO US NAVY IN MIDDLE EAST", Seoul, 2008/01/23) reported that an ROK liaison officer was deployed to the U.S. Navy's 5th fleet which is stationed in Bahrain in an effort to protect ROK residents as well as the ships and sailors in the area. The officer who left for Bahrain will be working for better cooperation with the U.S. Navy. One military officer said since an increasing number of ships are fishing in the region, there are more possibilities of them being threatened by the pirates. The dispatch was done not only to strengthen ROK-US alliance, but also to ensure the ROK people's safety, he added.

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17. ROK-DPRK Relations

Yonhap News (Seoul, "NORTH KOREAN NEWSPAPER URGES US TO STOP NUCLEAR THREAT", Seoul, 2008/01/29) reported that the DPRK Rohdong Shinmun had asserted in an article that the US must withdraw its Army from the ROK and stop threatening the DPRK with nuclear weapons if they want to eliminate the root of nuclear war from the Korean Peninsula. The article added that ever since the US has made an official announcement that they had deployed nuclear weapon to the ROK in 1958, the whole peninsula was changed into "a nuclear powder keg."

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