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Contents in this Issue:

- I. NAPSNet
 - [1. DPRK Leadership](#)
 - [2. DPRK Government](#)
 - [3. Inter-Korean Relations](#)
 - [4. Peace Regime Working Group](#)
 - [5. ROK Afghanistan Dispatch](#)
 - [6. US-Japan Relations](#)
 - [7. Japan-Iraq Relations](#)
 - [8. Japan Environment](#)
 - [9. Russo-Japanese Relations](#)
 - [10. Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute](#)
 - [11. US on PRC Military](#)
 - [12. Cross-Straits Relations](#)
 - [13. PRC African Diplomacy](#)
 - [14. PRC Currency Issue](#)
 - [15. PRC Environment](#)
 - [16. PRC Energy](#)
 - [17. PRC Antarctic Exploration](#)
 - [18. PRC Leadership](#)

I. NAPSNet

1. DPRK Leadership

Bloomberg News (Bradley K. Martin and Taku Kato, "KIM JONG IL SEEMS HEALTHY, ELDEST SON TELLS FUJI NEWS IN MACAU", 2009/01/28) reported that the DPRK's ruler Kim Jong Il appears to be in good health, his eldest son said in remarks televised by Japan's Fuji News Network. His health "seems like very good," said Kim Jong Nam, who was speaking in English after landing at Macau's international airport late yesterday, FNN said. When asked whether he was interested in succeeding his father as North Korea's leader, Kim said "I am not interested by the issue, sorry."

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

2. DPRK Government

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "460,000 TROOPS NEEDED TO STABILIZE NK COLLAPSE", New York, 2009/01/28) reported that the ROK and the United States should maintain about 460,000 troops to deal with any unusual situation on the Korean Peninsula that results from internal instability in the DPRK, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) reported Wednesday. The figure represents a three-fold increase in the number of U.S. troops currently deployed to Iraq. As for a power transfer in the DPRK, the report suggests three scenarios. They are its leader Kim Jong-il picking a successor; competition among those already in power; and a failure in regime change.

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

3. Inter-Korean Relations

Reuters (Jack Kim, "NORTH KOREA CASH SENT WITH LEAFLETS ILLEGAL: SEOUL", Seoul, 2009/01/28) reported that ROK civic groups that send anti-Pyongyang leaflets into the DPRK are breaking the law and face prosecution if they enclose the DPRK's money, a ROK spokesman said. "It is against the law for civic groups to bring in North Korean currency without Unification Minister authorization and enclose it in leaflets," ministry spokesman Kim Ho-nyeon said. "It is the related ministries' position that such a request for authorization, if it comes, is likely to harm the order of South-North cooperation and thus will not be granted."

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

4. Peace Regime Working Group

Korea Times (Jung Sung-ki, "SIX-PARTY TALKS ON PEACE REGIME DUE IN MOSCOW", 2009/01/28) reported that a new round of six-party working group talks on the establishment of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula is expected to be held next month in Moscow, a foreign ministry official said. The expectation comes with reports that Russia's chief nuclear negotiator, Alexander Losyukov, is visiting Pyongyang. Seoul officials expect the third round of talks to be held from Feb. 19 to Feb. 20.

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

5. ROK Afghanistan Dispatch

Yonhap News (Lee Chi-dong, "S. KOREA TO GRADUALLY EXPAND ITS ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN", Seoul, 2009/01/28) reported that the ROK will focus on expanding its civilian-led operation in Afghanistan first and follow up with other contributions, a senior ROK government official said after his trip to the war-ravaged nation. Deputy Foreign Minister Lee Yong-joon said he discussed "specifics" of the ROK's future role in his meetings with Afghan officials and US military leaders. "Expanding our contribution to the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) will be a focal point to begin with," he said.

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

6. US-Japan Relations

Japan Times (Jun Hongo, "'PROACTIVE DIPLOMACY' PLEDGED", 2009/01/28) reported that Japan will demonstrate its leadership through "proactive diplomacy," including sending civilian aid to Afghanistan and passing new laws for antipiracy activities in Somalia, Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone said. In his major foreign policy speech to the Diet, Nakasone said the world faces a rash of problems, including economic turmoil, terrorism, regional disputes and climate change. "This is the time for us to express our views on such issues and develop a positive and a proactive diplomacy that will lead the international community," he said. "We aim to solidify the Japan-U.S. alliance" through frank and specific propositions, Nakasone said.

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

7. Japan-Iraq Relations

Agence France Press ("JAPAN EX-PM ON RARE IRAQ VISIT", Baghdad, 2009/01/28) reported that Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe signed a partnership accord with Iraq on Wednesday, on a rare visit to the country for a senior leader of the close US ally. Abe traveled as a special envoy of Prime Minister Taro Aso. In Baghdad, he met President Jalal Talabani and signed the Japan-Iraq partnership, which is aimed at strengthening the relationship in areas of economy and energy, chief cabinet secretary Takeo Kawamura told reporters. The Iraqi president said in a statement after the meeting: "The visit of the delegation to Iraq is evidence of the interest of Japan to boost bilateral ties."

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

8. Japan Environment

The Asahi Shimbun ("COMMISSION TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE TOKYO TO RESOLVE POLLUTION DISPUTES", 2009/01/28) reported that a government commission will work outside the Tokyo area to help settle pollution-related disputes in a manner that is faster and cheaper than bringing the battles to court, officials said. The Environmental Dispute Coordination Commission now handles complaints on soil contamination, industrial waste and other pollution issues at its office in Tokyo's Kasumigaseki district. Starting in fiscal 2009 that starts in April commission members will visit regions outside the Tokyo metropolitan area to settle disputes and use community halls and offices of chambers of commerce to conduct their business.

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

9. Russo-Japanese Relations

Associated Press ("JAPAN ASKS RUSSIA TO QUICKLY FREE SEIZED BOAT CREW", Tokyo, 2009/01/28) reported that Tokyo has asked the Russian coast guard to promptly release 10 Japanese crew members seized aboard their fishing boat while off Japan's northern coast, the top government spokesman said Wednesday. Kawamura said Tokyo has asked Russia to release the fishermen "as soon as possible, in light of international law and from a humanitarian standpoint." He said Japanese officials are still trying to determine the exact location of the boat and what it was doing at the time of its seizure.

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

10. Russo-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Kyodo News ("JAPAN CANCELS HUMANITARIAN AID TO RUSSIAN-HELD ISLANDS", 2009/01/28) reported that Japan decided to cancel humanitarian assistance to four disputed Russian-held islands for the remainder of fiscal 2008 through March this year as Russia demanded the previous day that Japanese government officials on a humanitarian mission submit disembarkation cards before arriving on one of the four islands, the Foreign Ministry said. The officials will head back to Japan as talks between Japan and Russia have broken down, the ministry said, adding that Tokyo conveyed its regrets over the issue to Moscow through diplomatic channels.

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

11. US on PRC Military

Voice of America ("U.S. MOVES TO COUNTER CHINESE MILITARY MODERNIZATION", Washington D.C., 2009/01/28) reported that U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said the United States is developing military capabilities to counter recent improvements in the PRC's ability to threaten U.S. forces in the Pacific. Mr. Gates is the only member of former-president Bush's cabinet asked to stay on under President Obama. In written testimony delivered to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary Gates said as the PRC modernizes its military, he is most concerned

about advances in its ability to attack ships, submarines and aircraft, and its advances in ballistic missile technology, anti-satellite weapons and cyber warfare. He said those advances "could threaten America's primary means of projecting power" and helping defend its allies in the Pacific.

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

12. Cross-Straits Relations

Xinhua News ("PANDA FEVER SWEEPS TAIWAN", Taipei, 2009/01/27) reported that Giant Panda fever has swept Taiwan since a pair of pandas from the PRC made their official debut at a Taipei zoo Monday, the first day of Chinese Lunar new year. A total of 18,899 people flocked to the Taipei Zoo to see the pandas Tuesday, according to the zoo. More than 5,000 people visited the pandas within the first 90 minutes of the opening of the zoo Monday. The city government estimates the pandas will attract about 6 million visitors to the zoo annually.

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

13. PRC African Diplomacy

Reuters (Alistair Thomson, "CHINA MARCHES ON IN AFRICA DESPITE DOWNTURN", Dakar, 2009/01/28) reported that PRC businessmen are taking a long-term view and pursuing strategic expansion in Africa even though the PRC's multiplying investments on the continent have lost some lustre in the global downturn. Beijing and PRC companies have pledged tens of billions of dollars to Africa in loans and investments mostly to secure raw materials for the world's fastest-growing large economy. That long-term interest remains intact, despite a worldwide economic slump that has hit the PRC's exports to the rich world and a sharp decline in Africa's mineral shipments to the PRC.

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

14. PRC Currency Issue

Reuters (Mike Dolan, "WRONG TIME FOR U.S. TO PUSH CHINA ON YUAN: MS'S ROACH", Davos, 2009/01/28) reported that The United States picked the wrong time to pressure Beijing to strengthen the yuan because PRC's economy is actually contracting quarter-on-quarter, Morgan Stanley's Asia Chairman, Stephen Roach, told Reuters on Wednesday. "China is going through a very difficult period," Roach said at the World Economic Forum in Davos. "This is the wrong time for the U.S. Treasury Secretary to turn belligerent on the Chinese currency."

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

15. PRC Environment

Reuters ("CHINA TO SUBSIDIZE PURCHASES OF CLEAN-ENERGY CARS", 2009/01/28) reported that the PRC's central government will subsidize purchases of clean-energy vehicles for public fleets in 13 cities to help the automobile industry develop green technology. The trial scheme will promote the use of electric, hybrid and fuel-cell vehicles by public transport operators, taxi firms and postal and sanitary services in cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, Xinhua quoted a finance ministry

statement as saying. Subsidies will be based on the gap in prices between more energy-efficient vehicles and those with traditional engines.

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

16. PRC Energy

Agence France Press ("CHINA'S DEADLY COAL MINES KILL FEWER PEOPLE IN 2008: REPORTS", Beijing, 2009/01/28) reported that the number of people killed in the PRC's notoriously dangerous coal mines dropped in 2008, the government and state media reported, indicating the total amount of fatalities was more than 3,200. Coal mine deaths dropped 15.1 percent in 2008 compared to the previous year, the official Xinhua news agency late on Tuesday quoted the country's State Administration of Work Safety as saying. The PRC saw the death rate per one million tonnes of coal production fall from 4.94 in 2002 to 1.18 last year, according to an online statement from the work safety administration.

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

17. PRC Antarctic Exploration

Xinhua News (Chang Ai'ling, "CHINA SETS UP 3RD ANTARCTIC RESEARCH STATION", 2009/01/28) reported that the PRC has set up its third Antarctic research station, also the country's first on the continent's inland, marking a significant step in polar exploration. The Kunlun station was erected at Dome Argus (Dome A), the pole's highest icecap at 4,093 meters above the sea level, on Tuesday by the country's 25th expedition team to the South Pole. The Kunlun station is designed to cover an area of 558.56 square meters. Its main construction, covering 236 square meters, will be completed by April, when the expedition team is expected to return. The station will be used to study glaciology, astronomy, topology, geophysics, atmospheric science and space physics in the Antarctic inland.

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

18. PRC Leadership

Xinhua News ("HU SPENDS FIRST DAY OF LUNAR NEW YEAR WITH ORDINARY PEOPLE", Nanchang, Jiangxi, 2009/01/27) reported that PRC President Hu Jintao visited railway staff and police officers on duty and ordinary people in eastern Jiangxi Province on the first day of the Lunar New Year. At the Nanchang Railway Station yesterday morning, Hu talked with passengers and ticket sales staff to check whether travelers had difficulty in buying tickets. Hu also visited the China Mobile's Jiangxi branch, reflecting the surge of cell phone subscribers to more than 600 million in the PRC. Hu also urged cadres to share happiness and woes with the masses of people, enhance their awareness of responsibility with good work performance, show a pioneering spirit to overcome difficulties, and stay away from illegal personal interests and temptations.

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

19. East Asia Economy

Kyodo News ("ILO FORSEES UP TO 230 MIL. JOBLESS PEOPLE IN 2009", Davos, 2009/01/28) reported that with the global financial crisis having triggered a serious slowdown in world economic growth, some 230 million people may be out of work worldwide in 2009, raising the global unemployment rate to 7.1 percent in one of the worst-case scenarios, the International Labor Organization said Wednesday. Among developing regions, the number of jobless workers in East Asia could reach 46 million, up sharply from 32 million. The report also said that the labor market outlook for 2009 depends on the effectiveness of coordinated government measures and the time it will take for the global economy to find a path toward sustainable growth.

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

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Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org