NAPSNet Daily Report 30 April, 2003

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report 30 April, 2003", NAPSNet Daily Report, April 30, 2003, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-30-april-2003/

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I. United States

1. DPRK Nuclear Weapons?

CNN News ("NORTH KOREA ADMITS NUKES, WARNS US," Seoul, 04/30/03) and Agence France-Presse ("NORTH KOREA HINTS PUBLICLY IT HAS NUCLEAR WEAPONS," Seoul, 04/30/03) reported that a DPRK in a foreign ministry statement hinted publicly Wednesday that it was developing nuclear weapons, saying US hostility had compelled it to opt for "a necessary deterrent force." The statement, by a foreign ministry spokesman, was seen as a further indication that the Stalinist state possessed a nuclear arsenal. "The reality requires the DPRK (DPRK) to deter the escalating US moves to stifle the DPRK with a physical force, compels it to opt for possessing a necessary deterrent force and put it into practice," the statement said. In a different dispatch, Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) also hinted at nuclear capability when it

said the US should scrap its nuclear weapons before DPRK followed suit. "The US which possesses the biggest number of nuclear weapons in the world and poses a constant threat to other sovereign countries with them should scrap its nuclear program before such a small country as the DPRK does," KCNA said. The spokesman asserted DPRK should possess the "means" to counter a US preemptive nuclear attack on the Stalinist country. "How can the possession of means by such a small country as the DPRK for just self-defence ... be 'threat' and 'blackmail?'" it said.

2. DPRK on US Role in DPRK-US Talks

BBC News ("NORTH KOREA ACCUSES US OVER TALKS," 04/30/03) reported that the DPRK says the US used a "mean trick" to hinder progress at last week's nuclear talks by focusing on the DPRK's alleged admission that it already had nuclear weapons. The KCNA news agency said the talks failed because of the US' refusal to consider DPRK's proposals to end the impasse. The DPRK also warned that US moves against it "compels it to opt for possessing a necessary deterrent force." The US says the DPRK told US officials at the talks in Beijing that it had nuclear weapons. DPRK has not made any such assertion in public. But it says further talks with the US are pointless if Washington continues to insist Pyongyang first scraps its suspected nuclear program. "The US, which possesses the biggest number of nuclear weapons in the world and poses a constant threat to other sovereign countries with them, should scrap its nuclear program before such a small country as [DPRK] does," KCNA said.

3. DPRK on Economic Sanctions Consequence

The Associated Press (Jae-Suk Yoo, "NORTH KOREA: SANCTION MOVE COULD TRIGGER WAR," Seoul, 04/30/03) reported that the DPRK said Wednesday that it would regard any US move to seek U.N. sanctions against the communist country as "the green light to a war." The warning came after the ROK and DPRK agreed to try to peacefully resolve the nuclear crisis, though the DPRK has said further talks with the US are useless unless it drops its demand that the North first scrap suspected atomic weapons programs. DPRK says abandoning such programs would leave it defenseless and has in the past said sanctions would be seen as a step toward war. The DPRK "will take self-defensive measures, regarding it as the green light to a war" if Washington seeks a U.N. resolution authorizing economic sanctions against it, DPRK said in a statement on KCNA, its official news agency. ROK Foreign Minister Yoon Young-kwan declined to answer a reporter's question Tuesday as to whether the ROK would support sanctions. He described the issue as a "very delicate and very sensitive."

4. DPRK Military

The Associated Press (George Gedda, "NORTH KOREA FEATURES FEARSOME MILITARY," Washington, 04/30/03) reported that it is a country with 1.17 million military personnel, the world's fifth largest. Its air force has more than 1,700 aircraft and the navy more than 800 ships. For all of the fuss about DPRK spent fuel rods, reprocessing capabilities, plutonium stocks and other trappings of its nuclear weapons program, the country's conventional forces are fearsome as well. An account of the DPRK's overall capacity was provided to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March by Gen. Leon J. LaPorte, commander of the US military in Korea. LaPorte said DPRK's ground force is the world's third largest, with almost 1 million active duty soldiers and an estimated 6 million reserves. "About 70 percent of the DPRK Army is deployed south of Pyongyang, where they are capable of attacking with very little tactical warning," he said. "The preponderance of the DPRK long range artillery force can strike Seoul from its current location." Still, the ROK army of about 600,000

soldiers is more technologically advanced and better trained than the DPRK's. The ROK also has 37,000 US troops permanently based there to back them up. As LaPorte noted, Chairman Kim Jong Il has a "military first" policy, meaning that all other budget items must take a back seat to the armed forces. About a third of the country's national wealth is devoted to the military, leaving almost everything else starved for funds.

5. DPRK-ROK Nuclear Diplomacy

LA Times ("SOUTH, NORTH KOREA AGREE TO SETTLE NUCLEAR STALEMATE," Seoul, 04/30/03) reported that the ROK and DPRK agreed today to try to peacefully resolve the nuclear standoff on the peninsula, but the significance of their accord was uncertain given the DPRK's insistence that Seoul not meddle. "South and DPRK will thoroughly consult each other's position on the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula and will continue cooperation to resolve this issue peacefully through dialogue," a joint statement said after four days of talks in Pyongyang. Despite the vow, the statement was unlikely to mark a change in attitude by DPRK. The DPRK has called the standoff a dispute with the US alone. The statement came after Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said the US was reviewing an offer by DPRK to give up its missiles and nuclear facilities in exchange for substantial US economic benefits.

6. ROK-US Relations

Agence France-Presse ("SOUTH KOREA CALLS FOR "ROCK-SOLID" ALLIANCE WITH US," Seoul, 04/30/03) reported that the ROK called for "rock-solid" ties with the US in guiding DPRK toward reconciliation and build lasting peace in Northeast Asia. Foreign Minister Yoon Young-Kwan said the strong alliance and close coordination between Seoul and Washington was fundamental to resolving the six-month-old crisis over DPRK's nuclear ambitions. "I have no doubt that the (South Korea)-US alliance will continue to be foundation on which the two nations strive to guide DPRK toward the past of reconciliation and cooperation and to build a lasting peace in Northeast Asia," he said. "The rock-solid alliance guarantees the maintenance of a strong defense." Yoon, speaking at the Seoul Foreign Correspondents Club, stressed the US and South Korea should build "a more mature partnership based on mutual understanding and respect." "The tool for making this possible is none other than engaging in serious and ingenious consultations and maintaining close coordination between the two countries at all times," he said. President Roh Moo-Hyun would "closely consult on a common approach to the peaceful resolution of DPRK's nuclear issue" at a summit next month with US President George W. Bush, said Yoon.

7. ROK Domestic Politics

The Associated Press (Sang-Huh Choe, "SOUTH KOREAN POLITICIAN DITCHES SUIT, TIE," Seoul, 04/30/03) reported that Yoo Si-min, a newly elected reformist lawmaker, tried something this week that no South Korean politician has ever tried: taking the oath of office without suit and tie. It proved an uphill battle. On Tuesday, when he appeared in the National Assembly to be sworn in - wearing beige slacks and a white T-shirt under his navy blue jacket - fellow legislators booed him off the podium. "Here in the Assembly, everyone wears the same identical dark suit. I just wanted to wear comfortable clothes when I work," said Yoo, 44. He was sworn in a day late on Wednesday - this time in suit and tie. The dispute over Yoo's dress underscores the conservative streak that endures in the ROK despite its modern economy and increasingly Western culture. Politicians almost always wear dark suits with white dress shirts and a lawmaker's badge on the lapel. The formal dress doesn't necessarily mean that legislators behave well - despite its solemn image, the National

Assembly is also a place where rival lawmakers swear at each other and scuffle to block passage of bills they don't like. Yoo, who won a parliamentary by-election last Thursday, is a key ally of President Roh Moo-hyun, who was elected in December with promises to engage communist DPRK and reform domestic politics. Roh has shaken up government's old-school image by naming ministers younger than their deputies. His culture minister, former movie director Lee Chang-dong, caused a stir when he showed up for work without ties or in colored dress shirts. Roh also chats and drinks cheap "soju" liquor with his aides in casual attire - something unthinkable for his predecessors. Still, when Yoo showed up for his swearing in Tuesday, his appearance shocked many conservative lawmakers, especially those affiliated with the Grand National Party, which controls the legislature. "This is not a night club!" shouted one legislator. "Are you planning to play table tennis here?" said Lee Won-chang, an opposition lawmaker. Several lawmakers walked out in protest, accusing Yoo of "defaming the Assembly." He was booed off the dais and returned Wednesday in more formal attire.

8. Japan Role in Post-War Iraq

The Japan Times ("YAMASAKI TELLS UAE MINISTER JAPAN IS READY TO LET SDF HELP REBUILD IRAQ," Abu Dhabi, 04/30/03) reported that Japan will consider dispatching the Self-Defense Forces on a noncombatant mission to help rebuild Iraq, the visiting secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party told the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday. Taku Yamasaki made the remarks during a meeting in Abu Dhabi with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Alnahyan, who welcomed Japan's plan to send the SDF and offered to provide facilities. Yamasaki's comments followed Tokyo's April 21 announcement of an aid package for Iraq featuring a possible dispatch of SDF troops. He and his ruling coalition counterparts are in the United Arab Emirates capital on the first leg of an eight-day visit to the Middle East. "If required by the international community, we would consider the possibility of dispatching the SDF and letting the forces play a role in rebuilding Iraq," Yamasaki was quoted as saying. Yamasaki said the Japanese troops could undertake missions involving civil engineering, medical services and transportation. In response, Hamdan offered his country's readiness to provide facilities if it is to accept the SDF. The aid package indicated Tokyo's willingness to consider dispatching SDF troops as well as civilian personnel by drawing up new legislation, the nature of which the government has yet to decide on.

9. DPRK on US DPRK Policy

The Korean Central News Agency of DPRK ("US URGED TO MAKE SWITCHOVER IN ITS DPRK POLICY," Pyongyang, 04/30/03) reported that the US moves to stifle the DPRK will be steadily escalated and the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula will never find any solution as long as the former pursues its hostile policy toward the latter. Minju Joson today says this in a signed commentary as regards the DPRK-US talks on the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula held in Beijing. The commentary says: At the talks the DPRK set forth a new bold proposal to clear up bilateral concerns of the DPRK and the US, the parties concerned, at the same time from its stand to peacefully settle the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula at an early date. The US, however, repeated its old assertion that the DPRK should "scrap its nuclear program before dialogue" without advancing any new proposal to settle the issue. At the recent Beijing talks, the US once again revealed its wrong stand on the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. It is quite obvious that as long as the US maintains such stand, the two sides will only waste time no matter how frequently they negotiate and such talks will not be of any help to the settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. What is urgent for the peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue is for the US to put into practice its will to make a switchover in its hostile policy toward the DPRK. Everything depends on the attitude of the US side.

10. PRC SARS Warning

BBC News ("BEIJING ISSUES NEW SARS WARNING," 04/30/03) reported that Beijing's acting mayor says hospitals are unable to cope with the high numbers of patients suffering from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Wang Qishan said there were not enough beds in designated units to take every patient. But he did not say what was happening to victims of the disease who could not be treated in hospital. The new warnings come amid increased regional efforts to stop the spread of the disease which has killed more than 350 people around the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) still advises people not to travel to parts of the PRC and Hong Kong, though it has lifted a similar warning about Toronto. But while new cases appear to be tailing off in Hong Kong and other affected areas, they are still on the increase in the PRC. "The situation in Beijing remains severe for SARS prevention and treatment. Infections have not yet been cut off," Wang said in a statement. Wang, who was appointed last week after his predecessor was fired for mishandling the outbreak, said Beijing has identified 21 hospitals to tackle the disease. But he added: "Due to a shortage of berths at designated hospitals, not all suspected SARS patients can be hospitalised there in a timely manner." Correspondents say that could be crucial, as quarantining patients away from the general population appears to have been key to the success of Vietnam, the only country declared to have controlled an outbreak.

11. PRC SARS Medical Coverage

Agence France-Presse ("CHINA PROMISES TO PAY FOR ALL SARS PATIENTS' MEDICAL TREATMENT," Beijing, 04/30/03) reported that faced with a potential explosion of SARS cases in poor, rural areas, the government has ordered all local authorities to bear the cost of medical treatment for patients struck down by the virus, state press said. The notice issued jointly by the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Health said local authorities would pay medical charges for SARS patients from rural areas and impoverished urban families, the Xinhua news agency reported. According to the directive, the central government will give subsidies to governments in western provinces and autonomous regions in an attempt to share the burden of SARS treatment costs.

12. SARS Cellphone Rumors Arrests

Agence France-Presse ("13 HELD IN SOUTHERN CHINA FOR SPREADING SARS RUMOURS BY MOBILE PHONES," Hong Kong, 04/30/03) reported that authorities have arrested 13 people in southern PRC for spreading rumours about the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic through text messages using mobile phones, it was reported. The 13 were arrested in Guangdong province for spreading rumours, the Wen Wei Po daily said. One of them was a jobless man in Shenzhen who was fined 200 yuan and detained for 15 days while facing further criminal charges, the daily said. Citing public security bureau officials, the paper said that on April 26 alone, some 2.13 million such messages were sent, claiming that SARS cases in China reached 10,000. Each recipient was told to resend the messages to another 10 people.

13. PRC SARS Stock Exchange Closures

BBC News ("CHINA SHUTS STOCK MARKET," 04/30/03) reported that the PRC's authorities have ordered the closure of the country's stock exchanges until 12 May as part of attempts to control the spread of the deadly SARS flu. The Shanghai and Shenzhen stock markets have both been told to take an extended May Day holiday because of the high concentration of people working there, the market regulator said. The closure was needed "to prevent the spread of SARS in crowded areas and

protect the health of investors and trading staff," the China Securities and Regulatory Commission (CSRC) said on its website. The PRC has already shut schools, restaurants and cinemas in Beijing. The May Day holiday was originally introduced to give an extra sparkle to the PRC's economy by encouraging people to travel and shop. It has been cut back nationwide from five days to seven to discourage people from traveling, especially by the vast army of migrant workers from rural areas with poor health care. But stock traders will get an extended holiday as the result of the latest decision. Although it is too early to gauge the economic impact of the SARS outbreak on the PRC, economists already fear it could shave up to 2% from the government's 7% growth target.

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.

Produced by the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development in partnership with:

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