NAPSNet Daily Report Monday, March 07, 2005

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNet Daily Report Monday, March 07, 2005", NAPSNet Daily Report, March 07, 2005, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-daily-report/napsnet-daily-report-monday-march-07-2005-2/

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I. United States

- 1. US on DPRK Nuclear Talks
2. PRC on DPRK Nuclear Talks
3. ROK on DPRK Nuclear Talks
4. Japan on DPRK Nuclear Talks
5. ROK - Russia on DPRK Nuclear Issue
6. US - ROK on DPRK Nuclear Issue
7. PRC on DPRK Nuclear Program
8. US on DPRK Nuclear Program
9. US on DPRK Drug Trafficking
10. US on DPRK Human Rights Act
11. DPRK on US Assessment of DPRK Human Rights
12. DPRK on US Pro-Democracy Bill
13. UN on Japanese Sanctions on the DPRK
14. Japan on DPRK Defectors
15. UN on DPRK Food Aid
16. Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation
17. Inter - Korean Disease Prevention
18. DPRK on Bird Flu
19. ROK, DPRK on ROK-Japan Territorial Dispute
20. Inter - Korean Nature Documentary
21. Inter - Korean Historical Collaboration
22. DPRK Assembly Session

23. DPRK Economic Reforms
24. PRC on DPRK Defectors
25. US - ROK Defense
26. Sino - Russian Cooperation
27. Sino - Japanese Territorial Dispute
28. Japan on Cross Strait Relations
29. PRC on Cross Strait Relations
30. Taiwan on Anti-Secession Law
31. PRC Agriculture Policy
32. PRC on Economic Disparity
33. PRC Energy Supply
34. PRC Web Censorship
35. Taiwan Assassination Attempt Suspect
36. NAPSNet Addendum

II. CanKor

- 37. CanKor # 199

Preceding NAPSNet Report

I. United States

1. DPRK on Nuclear Talks

Reuters ("N.KOREA SAYS NO TALKS WITHOUT U.S. RETRACTION", 2005-03-16) reported that the DPRK ruled out on Wednesday a return to stalled six-way talks on its nuclear weapons programs unless the US retracted its labeling of Pyongyang as an "outpost of tyranny." A spokesman for the DPRK Foreign Ministry also said recent comments by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice -- in which she refused to apologize for giving the DPRK the tyranny tag -- indicated the US did not want to hold talks. "It is quite illogical for the US to intend to negotiate with the DPRK without retracting its remarks listing its dialogue partner as an outpost of tyranny," the spokesman said in comments published by the DPRK's official KCNA news agency.

(return to top) The Associated Press ("N. KOREA BLAMES U.S. FOR NUKE TALKS HOLDUP", 2005-03-16) reported that the DPRK on Wednesday blamed Washington for the deadlock in international talks aimed at convincing Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear ambitions, and called for the immediate withdrawal of a US aircraft carrier docked in the ROK for joint military exercises. "The US is entirely to blame for the failure to resume the six-party talks and the grave obstacle laid in the way of the solution of the nuclear issue," an unnamed spokesman from the DPRK's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland said in a statement. "Leveling a gun at its dialogue partner in the wake of anchoring the aircraft flotilla at South Korean ports, the US is crying for the six-party talks and trying to force (the DPRK) to 'abandon its nuclear program,'" the spokesman said. "Such (a) high-handed and arrogant act fully reveals the aggressive colors of the Bush administration seeking to disarm the (DPRK) and vanquish it." (return to top)

2. US on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Reuters ("U.S. WILL SEEK OTHER OPTIONS IF N.KOREA TALKS FAILS", 2005-03-16) reported that stalled six-country negotiations on the DPRK's nuclear weapons program must be accelerated or other ways for dealing with it must be considered, the US pointman on the issue said on Tuesday. While the PRC-hosted talks are the preferred format for resolving the nuclear issue, "we need to see some progress here. If we don't, we need to look at other ways to deal with this," said Christopher Hill, US ambassador to the ROK. Hill talked about urging Russia and "any country doing any business" with the DPRK to reconsider activities that encourage Pyongyang's "bad behavior."

(return to top) Korea Times ("RICE REJECTS SEPARATE DEAL IN NUKE TALKS", 2005-03-16) reported that the US will not allow "separate deals" with the DPRK since it believes the multilateral talks foster a united front to resolve the dispute over the DPRK's nuclear arms program, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said on Tuesday. "The six-party framework is the best and most reliable way to deal with the North Korean program, because it has all of the important neighbors at the table," Rice told reporters en route to India. On her first tour of Asia since her inauguration late last month the US secretary seeks to form a "coordinated strategy" to bring Pyongyang back to the six-party talks. (return to top)

3. DPRK on Nuclear Program

Yonhap ("NORTH KOREA VOWS TO EXPAND NUCLEAR ARSENAL", 2005-03-16) reported that the DPRK on Wednesday vehemently denounced US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and vowed to further expand its nuclear arsenal to defend itself from US hostility. The DPRK's Foreign Ministry said through its spokesman that any moves to continue expanding its nuclear arsenal would be justified by a suspected US bid to isolate and crush the DPRK.

(return to top)

4. US on DPRK Nuclear Program

Washington Post ("IN ASIA, RICE SAYS NORTH KOREA MORE ISOLATED FROM NEIGHBORS", 2005-03-16) reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asserted Tuesday that the DPRK's "isolation from its neighbors has deepened" as it has bolstered its nuclear stockpile in the past year, even as the ROK and PRC continue to maintain close economic links to the DPRK. Rice also brushed aside the DPRK's pronouncement Tuesday that it might increase its nuclear arsenal to maintain a balance of power in East Asia and help prevent a US attack. Rice reiterated the administration's position that it had "no intention" of attacking or invading the DPRK.

(return to top)

5. US on PRC Role in DPRK Nuclear Talks

Agence France Presse ("CHINA MUST PLAY BIGGER ROLE IN NORTH KOREA NUKES TALKS: US ENVOY", 2005-03-16) reported that the PRC should step up efforts to convince the DPRK to return to negotiations on its nuclear weapons program, the US envoy to the stalled six-party talks said. "We believe that China can do even more to bring its full influence, not just to persuade North Korea to return to the talks as soon as possible but to commit to comprehensive denuclearization," Joseph DeTrani, the State Department's representative at the talks, told a Senate panel.

(return to top)

6. US-ROK Relations on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Donga Ilbo ("U.S.: “THE SIX-PARTY TALKS CANNOT CONTINUE FOREVER”", None) reported that US Ambassador to the ROK Christopher Hill, who was appointed as assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said on Tuesday that the six-party talks cannot continue on forever and if the DPRK keeps refusing to participate in the talks, the US would have to look for other ways. Ambassador Hill said, “we (the US and ROK) are sending different messages to North Korea, and North Korea is using this to their advantage,” acknowledging that there exists a discrepancy between the US and ROK. Furthermore, he added, “the US and South Korea are having intimate talks, but since South Korea is located on the Korean peninsula, its perspective slightly differs from that of the US”

(return to top)

7. ROK on US Role in DPRK Nuclear Talks

Choson Ilbo ("PARK GEUN-HYE ASKS WASHINGTON TO MAKE N.KOREA AN OFFER", 2005-03-16) reported that in a startling break with received wisdom, the chairwoman of the ROK's opposition Grand National Party (GNP) Park Geun-hye on Tuesday called on the US to make the DPRK "a practical and bold" offer if it wants to resolve the nuclear standoff in the peninsula. Meeting with former US undersecretary of state Arnold Lee Kantor and White House deputy national security advisor Jack D. Crouch II, Park said, "To have North Korea return to the six-party talks and resolve the nuclear issue, the United States should first present a specific, practical and bold proposal." Proposals could include establishing diplomatic relations between Washington and Pyongyang and security guarantees for the regime, she said.

(return to top)

8. Inter - Korean Energy Cooperation

Yonhap ("S. KOREA BEGINS SUPPLYING ELECTRICITY TO N. KOREA", 2005-03-16) reported that the ROK on Wednesday began supplying electricity to a pilot industrial park in the DPRK border town of Kaesong, marking the ROK's first power transmission across the border, officials said. The provision of electricity came amid growing US calls for prudence in pursuing large-scale economic cooperation with the DPRK. ROK officials believe the Kaesong project will help prod the DPRK to open up to the outside world, resume stalled inter-Korean dialogue and break the nuclear impasse.

(return to top) The Associated Press ("ELECTRICITY IS CARROT IN NORTH KOREA TALKS", 2005-03-16) reported that nighttime spy satellite photos illustrate the stark contrast between the two Koreas: The capitalist ROK is aglow with shimmering constellations of light, while the DPRK disappears into blackness as deep as the aura of secrecy surrounding the DPRK. That's now changing for a small corner of the DPRK. On Wednesday, for the first time since the Koreas were divided, the ROK began piping electricity into the DPRK for a joint economic zone meant to foster cooperation between the countries sharing the world's most heavily fortified border. (return to top)

9. ROK-PRC Relations on DPRK Nuclear Talks

Choson Ilbo ("DEFENSE MINISTER TO VISIT CHINA FOR TALKS", 2005-03-16) reported that the ROK's Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung is expected to visit the PRC at the end of this month to discuss the DPRK's nuclear weapons program and other security issues in the region. Yoon's trip is

taking place amid a flurry of diplomatic activity aimed at bringing the DPRK back to stalled nuclear disarmament talks. During his four-day trip from March 30, Yoon is scheduled to meet PRC Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan and other PRC military officials.

(return to top)

10. Russia on DPRK Nuclear Talks

RIA Novosti ("CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF OF RUSSIA'S ARMED FORCES TO LEAVE FOR BEIJING AND SEOUL ON A VISIT", 2005-03-16) reported that Chief of the General Staff of Russia's Armed Forces Yuri Baluyevsky will pay working visits to the PRC and ROK, the Defense Ministry of Russia reported. According to the agency's interlocutor, in the course of the trip which is beginning on Wednesday it is planned to discuss the questions of military and military-technical cooperation and international security. It is expected, along with the questions of military and military-technical cooperation, the DPRK's nuclear program and the situation on the Korean Peninsula as a whole will become a separate theme of the talks in Seoul.

(return to top)

11. ROK-Japanese Relations and the DPRK Nuclear Issue

Korea Times ("ROW WITH JAPAN FEARED TO AFFECT NUCLEAR TALKS", 2005-03-16) reported that the ROK should calmly address Japan's attempts to lay claim to the Tokto islets because a diplomatic row with Japan could affect the six-nation talks over the DPRK's nuclear weapons program, former Unification Minister Park Jae-kyu said Wednesday. "The confrontation with Japan over Tokto could unduly influence the six-party talks," Park, president of Kyungnam University, told The Korea Times. "People are filled with anti-Japan sentiment, but the government should keep its composure." Japan could try to distract the six-party talks if the current situation turns ugly, Park warned, saying the most urgent task now is to tackle the DPRK's nuclear ambitions.

(return to top)

12. IAEA on DPRK Nuclear Issue

Kyodo News ("IAEA CHIEF SAYS N. KOREA IS LEADING CHALLENGE", 2005-03-16) reported that the head of the UN nuclear watchdog labeled DPRK as the "No. 1 challenge to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty" on Wednesday. International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Mohamed ElBaradei said multilateral and bilateral talks are needed to tackle the "urgent problem" of the DPRK. Speaking at an IAEA conference on nuclear security, ElBaradei said it was vital that the DPRK nuclear program come under "global ownership" in order to ensure that nuclear developments are not merely talked about, but acted upon.

(return to top)

13. DPRK on US-ROK Joint Military Exercise

Yonhap news ("N.K. ISSUES VEILED THREAT ON JOINT MILITARY DRILL", 2005-03-16) reported that the DPRK warned Wednesday that it would not just remain a passive observer to planned joint ROK-US military exercises, condemning the drills as a prelude to the launching of a nuclear war against the DPRK. "The US seeks to finally round off its preparations for a Korean war by staging large-scale joint military exercises in South Korea after massing huge forces in areas around the

Korean Peninsula," the DPRK's Korean Central News Agency said in a commentary.

(return to top)

14. Japan on Abductee Issue

Kyodo News ("JAPAN REPEATS CALL ON U.N. PANEL TO HELP RESOLVE ABDUCTION ISSUE", 2005-03-16) reported that Japan reiterated its call on the UN Human Rights Commission on Wednesday to help resolve the issue of the DPRK's abductions of Japanese citizens. Itsunori Onodera, a parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs, said in a speech before the commission in Geneva that Japan wants the commission to "settle the issue promptly by way of the immediate repatriation of surviving abductees and finding out the truth."

(return to top)

15. Conference on DPRK Nuclear Issue

Kyodo News ("INFORMAL 5-PARTY N. KOREA NUKE TALKS OPEN IN SHANGHAI", 2005-03-16) reported that about 50 government officials and academics from five countries, including Japan and the US, met in the PRC on Wednesday to discuss how their nations should manage any agreements on the DPRK's abandonment of its nuclear ambitions. The participants, also from PRC, Russia and the ROK, came together for a two-day informal meeting to study how their countries could jointly implement agreement details such as verification and dismantlement of nuclear weaponry, according to the conference agenda.

(return to top)

16. DPRK Assembly Session

Kyodo News ("N. KOREAN LEGISLATURE SESSION LIKELY AFTER EARLY APRIL: SOURCE", 2005-03-16) reported that the DPRK is likely to hold a legislative session postponed from earlier this month sometime after early April as senior officials will be on overseas trips until that time, a diplomatic source said Wednesday. Arrangements are under way for Choe Thae Bok, chairman of the Supreme People's Assembly, to visit Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, from the end of March to early April, making it unlikely for the legislature to convene this month, according to the source.

(return to top)

17. DPRK Public Execution

Chosun Ilbo ("JAPANESE TV SHOWS N. KOREAN EXECUTION", 2005-03-16) reported that Japan's n-TV on Wednesday aired footage of a public execution in the DPRK. The channel ran the footage obtained from a defector on its afternoon news program "News Plus 1." The full video is 90 minutes in length and was shot by a DPRK defector who clandestinely re-entered the DPRK. The footage is the first visual evidence confirming reports of a recent spate of public executions in the DPRK. The video captures public executions carried out in the Sino-DPRK border town of Hoeryeong, North Hamgyeong Province on March 1-2, from public trial to death by firing squad.

(return to top) Choson Ilbo ("N. KOREA'S PUBLIC EXECUTIONS 'TEACH LESSONS'", 2005-03-16) reported that the DPRK is one of the few nations where executions, usually of political prisoners, are carried out in public. Public executions are carried out in similar fashions for both political and

economic criminals. Before the execution, a judge reads the sentence, orders the execution, and the convict is then hung or shot. Hangings are reserved for more serious crimes. During executions by firing squad, three soldiers fire at each condemned man. (return to top)

18. DPRK Bird Flu Outbreak

Yonhap news ("WHO VERIFYING BIRD FLU IN NK", 2005-03-16) reported that the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Tuesday it was trying to verify news reports of an outbreak of bird influenza in the DPRK. "Our regional office has requested more information from the (DPRK) Ministry of Health," WHO spokesman Dick Thomson told reporters. He said the organization became aware of the suspected outbreak from a report. "This report is based on conversations by traveling businessmen, so right now it's at the level of rumor, but we're in the process of verification," he said.

(return to top)

19. Japan on DPRK Bird Flu Outbreak

Kyodo News ("JAPAN HALTS IMPORTS OF N. KOREA POULTRY AFTER BIRD FLU REPORT", 2005-03-16) reported that Japan has halted imports of poultry from the DPRK following a ROK report about a bird flu outbreak in Pyongyang, the government said Wednesday. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries said it has not been able to confirm the facts with DPRK authorities, and decided to impose a preemptive import embargo. The ministry will work to confirm the outbreak through letters with the DPRK and the Office International des Epizooties, an international authority on animal health and disease of which the DPRK is a member.

(return to top)

20. US-ROK Military Alliance

Choson Ilbo ("KOREA TO BEAR LESSER BURDEN FOR USFK", 2005-03-16) reported that this year, ROK will pay less to keep US forces in the country as part of an agreement reached during the latest round of talks between the two countries on Tuesday. As a result, the ROK's share of the budget for the US troop presence has been cut by W60 billion or around US$60 million.

(return to top)

21. Japan on ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

The Associated Press ("JAPAN ASSEMBLY VOTES ON S. KOREA-HELD LAND", 2005-03-16) reported that a provincial assembly voted Wednesday to assert Japan's territorial claim over a cluster of ROK-held islands, raising the stakes in a dispute that has strained relations between the two countries. The Shimane Prefectural Assembly approved a symbolic measure making Feb. 22 "Takeshima Day" to celebrate Japan's claim of sovereignty over the volcanic islets, said assembly official Miho Fukushiro. "We hope the central government will take more active measures to establish territorial rights over Takeshima," Shimane Gov. Nobuyoshi Sumita said following the vote.

(return to top)

22. ROK on ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Choson Ilbo ("GREATER ISSUES THAN DOKDO ARE AT STAKE", 2005-03-16) reported that Japan's

Shimane Prefecture on Wednesday passed a bill designating Feb. 22 "Takeshima Day" after the Japanese name for the Dokdo Islands, ignoring the ROK's warning of serious consequences. At a time when the two countries have proclaimed a friendship year marking the 40th anniversary of the normalization of ties, Japan has committed a hostile act not far from a declaration of war. We can read in Japan's attitude, such as provocations against the Dokto islands and its attempts to whitebr its past atrocities -- all in the face of public opinion in the ROK -- the initiative of the new Japanese right to revise its peace constitution and expand the influence of the Japanese military.

(return to top)

23. DPRK on ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Yonhap ("NORTH KOREA WARNS JAPAN NOT TO ENCROACH ON S. KOREAN ISLETS", 2005-0--16) reported that denouncing Japan's moves to boost its claim to the ROK islets of Dokdo, the DPRK issued a strongly-worded statement Wednesday demanding Tokyo not to infringe upon Korean territorial rights. The DPRK's main newspaper Rodong Shinmun reiterated its accusation that Japan was violating Korea's territorial sovereignty by establishing a day for the islets.

(return to top)

24. ROK-Japanese Territorial Dispute

Donga Ilbo ("FUTURE OF ROK-U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE AT STAKE ", 2005-03-16) reported that the relationship between the ROK and Japan has become more sour these days than ever. Direct causes are Japan's claim on Dokdo, the controversial islets, and its distortion of history textbooks amid an overall rightist atmosphere. As such, to improve the worsening relationship between the two, a broader approach, transcending the Dokdo issue is necessary for the future of the triple alliance between the ROK, the US, and Japan, and the conflict structure within Northeast Asia. One governmental official who has recently stayed in Japan said, "In the relationship between Korea, the US, and Japan, Korea is rapidly becoming isolated. The US-Japan relationship is getting stronger, and because they are more suspicious of Korea getting closer to China, Korea is being left out even more."

(return to top)

25. Cross Strait Relations

Reuters ("TAIWAN'S CHEN BLASTS CHINA LAW, CALLS FOR PROTEST", 2005-03-16) reported that Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian said Wednesday PRC's passage of what he called an invasive anti-secession law would further alienate the island from the mainland and told his people to join a massive protest. Chen, in his first public statement on the PRC legislation that would allow the use of military force against Taiwan, defended the sovereignty of his self-ruled island, saying the PRC had no right to decide its political future. "After the international community voiced almost unanimous opposition and repeatedly expressed serious concerns, China still ... unilaterally passed this invasive law," Chen said.

(return to top)

26. US on PRC Arms Ban

The Associated Press ("RICE: EUROPE MAY RETHINK CHINA ARMS SALES", 2005-03-16) reported

that the PRC's new law authorizing military force against Taiwan could make Europe think twice about selling new weaponry to the PRC, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Tuesday. "The Europeans ... know very well our views on the arms embargo, that this is not a time to end the arms embargo," Rice told reporters en route to India, first stop on her one-week trip. "I would hope it would at least remind the Europeans that there are still serious security issues in this region."

(return to top)

27. Sino-US Nuclear Technology Transfer

Reuters ("WHITE HOUSE SEES LITTLE RISK IN CHINA NUCLEAR DEAL", 2005-03-16) reported that the Bush administration sees little proliferation risk in helping Westinghouse Electric Co. build nuclear power plants in the PRC for a state-run firm once accused of transferring sensitive technology to Iran and Pakistan, officials said on Tuesday. But the White House has promised a thorough review before approval of up to $5 billion in Export-Import Bank direct loans and guarantees to help Westinghouse and other US suppliers win the contracts to build four plants.

(return to top)

28. PRC Media Control

The New York Times ("CHINA PROPAGANDA OFFICE MAY BE CENSORING THE PREMIER", 2005-03-16) reported that the PRC is often seen as being run by a few men who have largely unrestrained power. Yet sometimes even the prime minister's word is not law. On Monday, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao answered questions from national and international journalists for nearly two hours at the conclusion of the National People's Congress, the PRC's annual legislative session, the only scheduled press appearance he makes each year. Major government-controlled newspapers published identical transcripts of his comments on Tuesday, identical to each other, that is, but not to what he said at the news conference. The prime minister, in other words, either cleaned up his own remarks or was censored.

(return to top)

29. PRC Climate Change

The Associated Press ("GROUP WARNS OF SHRINKING GLACIERS' EFFECT", 2005-03-16) reported that the shrinking of Himalayan glaciers could fuel an upswing in flooding in the PRC, India and Nepal, before creating water shortages for hundreds of millions of people across the region, a leading environmental group warned Monday. In a report, the Switzerland-based World Wide Fund for Nature said the rate of retreat of the Asian mountain range's glaciers is accelerating because of global warming, and has now reached 33-49 feet a year. "The rapid melting of Himalayan glaciers will first increase the volume of water in rivers causing widespread flooding," said Jennifer Morgan, head of WWF's global climate change program. "But in a few decades this situation will change and the water level in rivers will decline, meaning massive economic and environmental problems for people in Western PRC, Nepal and Northern India."

(return to top)

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