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I. United States

1. Multilateral Talks

The Washington Post ("N. KOREA TO RESUME NUCLEAR TALKS; NEIGHBORS NOT OPTIMISTIC", 2004-06-17) reported that the DPRK agreed to a new round of six-nation talks next week aimed at dismantling its nuclear weapons programs, officials announced. But representatives of the four Asian countries involved immediately sought to play down the prospects of a quick resolution to the 20-month crisis in which the DPRK is believed to have expanded their nuclear arsenal. High-level disarmament talks are scheduled for June 23-26 in Beijing, after a two-day round of mid-level negotiations starting June 21, according to PRC, Japanese and ROK officials. The talks -- involving the US, the PRC, Russia, Japan, the ROK and the DPRK -- follow two rounds of high-level negotiations and one round of mid-level meetings, which all failed to yield significant results. "The Korean Peninsula's nuclear problem is very complicated," Zhang Qiyue, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, told reporters in Beijing. "It is very difficult for any side to expect to resolve all the issues in one round or two rounds of talks." "We have no indication to demonstrate that the U.S. has become more flexible," Jiro Okuyama, spokesman for Japan's Foreign Ministry, said in an interview. He said Japan still "closely shared" the U.S. position, and would continue to press the DPRK for a complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantling.

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2. US-DPRK Relations

Reuters ("THIRD TIME LUCKY AT KOREA TALKS? UNLIKELY, MANY SAY", 2004-06-17) reported that, from the perspectives of Washington and Pyongyang, the timing is not right to make the concessions that would be necessary for a major breakthrough, analysts and diplomats say. "We are now in a wait-and-see mode until the U.S. election," said a Western diplomat who has followed the talks closely and visited the DPRK several times since the nuclear crisis erupted in October 2002. The DPRK is holding out to see if U.S. voters push President Bush aside in November in favor of what the DPRK hopes will be a more accommodating administration under Democratic presidential hopeful John Kerry, he said. "They do speak with fondness about the dying days of the Clinton administration," the diplomat said. The DPRK's goal at this round will be two-fold, analysts say -- look constructive and avoid the blame if talks break down. The Bush administration, for its part, has not backed down from its demands for the "complete, verifiable, irreversible dismantlement" of all of the DPRK's nuclear programs -- a precondition the DPRK has said is unacceptable. More importantly, though, Washington is increasingly consumed with the handover of Iraqi sovereignty on June 30. "If these talks do not show progress, then because of the American presidential election, the frustration of many participants in the six-party talks, I believe that a window of peace will be lost until the very best next year," said Bill Richardson, a potential Democratic vice presidential nominee who has been deeply involved in DPRK issues. "The talks are deadlocked. They are not moving forward," Richardson, currently the governor of New Mexico, said at a conference in Seoul. At the last round of talks, the DPRK won basic support for a vague "reward for freeze" deal under which it would stop its nuclear activities for aid, most likely in the form of oil. The US has said any freeze would have to be a step toward dismantlement.

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3. DPRK-Russian Relations

Reuters ("RUSSIA SAYS N.KOREA'S KIM NOT VISITING THIS MONTH", 2004-06-17) reported that Russia denied a report that DPRK leader Kim Jong-il might visit Russia's energy-rich Far East this month, but left open the possibility he might make a trip there before long. "This is absolutely not true," a Kremlin spokesman in Moscow said in answer to a question about a report by the ROK's Yonhap news agency that Kim might start a visit to the Russian Far East around June 28. "You can quote us on that if you like," the spokesman added. The Kremlin spokesman acknowledged the Russians and the DPRK had discussed the possibility of Kim visiting Russia again. He has visited twice before as DPRK leader, most recently to the Russian Far East in 2002. "Perhaps they discussed something there, that he (Kim) might soon perhaps come. They jump the gun all the time. It's traditional South Korean," the spokesman said, in a comment that left open the possibility of a visit in the near future. Kim was unlikely to go to Moscow because he travels by train rather than plane. Russia shares a tiny border with the DPRK. If Kim does visit Russia again, it will be one more in a series of high-profile diplomatic contacts by the DPRK as the crisis over Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions drags on with no solution in sight. Diplomatic sources say the energy-starved DPRK is particularly interested in cooperating with Russia, which has abundant gas and oil. The DPRK's energy shortages grow more acute in winter months, so Pyongyang may be planning ahead.

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4. US-PRC Relations

Agence France-Presse ("US ASKED TO BEEF UP TAIWAN'S DEFENSE UNDER ONE-CHINA POLICY REVIEW", 2004-06-17) reported that the US government was asked to beef up Taiwan's defense against possible attack from the PRC as Congress debated an independent report seeking a revamp of the US's one-China policy. The bipartisan US-China Economic and Security Review Commission proposed on Tuesday that the US reform its policies towards the PRC on economy and security, including the one-China policy which dictates relations with Taiwan. Members of the commission testified on Wednesday before the powerful House Armed Services Committee, urging the government to consider stepping up military aid to Taiwan to counter the PRC's defense build-up against the island. Commission member Carolyn Bartholomew said the call for a fresh assessment of US cross-Strait policy was made against the backdrop of the PRC's "ratcheting up its military modernization program aimed at Taiwan" amid growing frictions between the PRC and Taiwan. "Everybody keeps talking about maintaining the status quo in cross-Strait relations but the status quo actually keeps changing," she said, pointing out that the one-China policy was outdated as it was crafted 25 years ago when the PRC was not a military and economic power. Roger Robinson, commission chairman, referred to "changing realities on the ground" that required the US government to consider, among other things, reviewing its defense assistance to Taiwan.

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5. US-PRC Trade Relations

Reuters("U.S. VOWS TOUGH ENFORCEMENT OF TRADE LAWS ON CHINA", 2004-06-17) reported that Commerce Secretary Don Evans vowed "tough" enforcement of U.S. trade laws on Thursday, one day before his department is due to make a preliminary decision whether to impose potentially massive import duties on wooden bedroom furniture from the PRC. "We are going to continue to look American workers in the eye, all across this country, and tell them we are going to be tough when it comes to enforcing our trade laws and maintaining a level playing field with the rest of the

world. And China is certainly right there at the top of the list," Evans said in an interview on CNBC.

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6. PRC-Russian Relations

The Associated Press ("RUSSIA, CHINA, C. ASIA IN SECURITY PACT", 2004-06-17) reported that the presidents of the PRC, Russia and four Central Asian nations met to breathe life into a security alliance and open an anti-terrorism center, part of efforts by the PRC and Russia to counter the U.S. military presence in the region. The leaders were joined by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who warned terrorists have continued infiltrating Afghanistan and that eradicating terrorism is a "long-term fight." The one-day summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or SCO, marked what Russian President Vladimir Putin said was the start of its work to become a vital international institution. He acknowledged the group would help Russia exert its influence across the region, rich in under-exploited energy resources and a crossroads between Asia and Europe. "The voice of Russia will be heard here," Putin told reporters after the summit. To ensure the PRC is also heard, President Hu Jintao offered $900 million in credit to alliance countries, which include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The exact terms of the loans, intended to boost economic cooperation, weren't immediately disclosed. The PRC and Russia have pushed the SCO, originally founded in 1996 and renamed in 2001, as a means of responding to increased U.S. regional influence since the Sept. 11 attacks. Ahead of Thursday's talks, Russia and the PRC signed separate bilateral agreements with Uzbekistan, Central Asia's most populous country with its strongest military. Russia's Lukoil signed a $1 billion investment deal with Uzbekistan's state oil and gas company, and Putin said energy giant Gazprom was working on similar plans.

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7. DPRK-PRC Relations

Korean Central News Agency of DPRK ("FRIENDLY GATHERING HELD", 2004-06-16) reported that PRC Ambassador E.P. to the DPRK Wu Donghe arranged a friendly gathering at his embassy Tuesday evening in connection with leader Kim Jong Il's successful historic unofficial visit to the PRC. Present on invitation were Pak Kyong Son, vice department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, and officials concerned. Staff members of the Chinese embassy here were also on hand. Speeches were made there. Recalling that Kim Jong Il paid an unofficial visit to the PRC and met the new collective leadership of the PRC with Hu Jintao as general secretary, they said this marked a historic event in strengthening and developing the friendly and cooperative relations between the two parties and peoples of the DPRK and the PRC. The participants talked to one another about the need to boost these relations, deepening the friendship.

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8. PRC Domestic Issues

The New York Times ("2ND IN COMMAND IN HONG KONG JOINS EFFORTS TO EASE TENSIONS", 2004-06-17) reported that Democracy advocates, mainland PRC officials and Hong Kong government leaders have begun trying to reduce tensions before a big demonstration planned for July 1, with Hong Kong's second-ranking official issuing the latest initiative on Wednesday. The Democratic Party, the main political opposition here, pledged last week to tone down its criticism of the mainland. Tung Chee-hwa, Hong Kong's chief executive, has agreed to hold a rare meeting with the party's lawmakers on Friday. Mainland officials have expressed an interest in expanding contacts

with the democracy movement here, while stopping short of agreeing to a public dialogue that might suggest an official recognition of the widespread desire here for greater voting rights. The mainland's stance still represents a slight softening in what seemed earlier this year to be an increasingly intransigent opposition by the PRC to tolerating any expansion of democracy on its soil. Donald Tsang, the chief secretary and second most senior official after Mr. Tung in this relatively autonomous PRC territory, said in a speech to business leaders on Wednesday that greater democracy was inevitable here, despite Beijing's moves this spring to limit general elections for at least eight years. Mr. Tsang urged people in business to join political parties and run for local office instead of continuing to try to influence policy from behind the scenes. Loath to enter politics, local tycoons have repeatedly appealed to Beijing for help in the last year in turning back a democracy movement that has called for general elections, but also wants broader social legislation, including the introduction of a minimum wage and regulations on housing costs. "The public is demanding greater inclusion, transparency and openness in our political development and policy making," said Mr. Tsang, who oversees the task force working with Beijing on Hong Kong's constitutional development. "It is perfectly understandable and should be applauded as a sign of progress."

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9. PRC Human Rights

Agence France-Presse ("RIGHTS GROUPS PROTEST AS CHINA CALLS OFF VISIT BY UN TORTURE EXPERT", 2004-06-17) reported that human rights groups accused the PRC of failing in its commitment to abide by its international obligations after a visit by a UN human rights expert dealing with torture was called off. The PRC government asked for more time to prepare for the two-week trip this month by UN special rapporteur Theo van Boven in view of the different authorities and regions involved, the United Nations said in a statement. "The Chinese government has engaged in a recurring strategy of responding to international pressure and scrutiny with well-timed overtures that it and other governments can point to as indicators of Chinas progress in human rights reforms...," Human Rights in China said. "Once the pressure recedes, these overtures are all too often withdrawn." Van Boven, who was due to present his report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Commission, lamented the delay, stressing that freedom to make inquiries as well as access to places of detention were necessary for a proper assessment. A visit to China by the UN rapporteur on torture has been planned for a decade, but is yet to happen.

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10. ROK Plan for Iraq

The Associated Press ("S. KOREA RULING PARTY BACKS PLAN FOR IRAQ", 2004-06-17) reported that the ROK's ruling party on Thursday backed government plans to send 3,600 soldiers to northern Iraq, overcoming resistance from some members who had demanded that the long-delayed dispatch be reconsidered. The decision was made in a meeting of Uri party leaders after President Roh Moo-hyun appealed to them for cooperation. The National Security Council was expected to meet this week to decide details of the deployment, and the ROK reportedly plans to send the troops to Irbil in northern Iraq this summer. The deployment - would make the ROK the largest coalition partner after the US and Britain. It was approved when the National Assembly was controlled by the conservative Grand National Party, but the liberal Uri won a majority in parliament in April elections and the decision was delayed. Rep. Ahn Young-keun, head of the Uri party's policy coordination committee, said the party would "respect" the plan.

II. Japan

1. Japan-DPRK Relations

The Japan Times ("AID DETAILS UNCLEAR", 2004-06-05) reported that Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi on June 4 said she hopes she can hold a second bilateral meeting with her North Korean counterpart, Paek Nam Sun, on the sidelines of an Asian regional forum meeting planned for early July in Jakarta. "We held Japan-North Korea (foreign ministerial) talks two years ago on the sidelines of an ARF meeting. I'm willing to meet" with Paek again, Kawaguchi said during a news conference. But Kawaguchi said it is not certain that Paek will attend the Jakarta meeting.

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2. Japan-DPRK Abduction Cases

The Japan Times ("ABDUCTEE'S BROTHER SAYS HE WILL RUN AS INDEPENDENT IN UPPER HOUSE POLL", 2004-06-05) reported that Teruaki Masumoto, a key member of a group of Japanese whose family members were abducted to the DPRK, announced on June 4 that he will run as an independent in next month's House of Councilors election. Masumoto, 48, is the younger brother of Rumiko Masumoto. The DPRK has admitted to having kidnapped her but has said that she later died. Speaking at a news conference, Masumoto said that his distrust of the government and the Diet led to his decision to run in the Upper House race. "The abduction issue will not be resolved by merely lobbying the government and politicians," Masumoto said. "The ones who were agonized by the abductions, which are a violation of (our nation's) sovereignty, need to get serious and change Japan's politics." Shigeru Yokota, head of the families' group and father of Megumi Yokota, kidnapped in 1977 at the age of 13, said that while the group will not officially support Masumoto's candidacy, its members intend to fully back him. Yokota will head Masumoto's campaign support group, while Kazuhiro Araki, leader of the Investigation on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea, will manage his campaign headquarters.

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3. Japan Vice Foreign Minister Visit to Libya and Egypt

The Japan Times ("SPECIAL ENVOY TO VISIT LIBYA, EGYPT", 2004-06-07) reported that Senior Vice Foreign Minister Ichiro Aisawa, acting as a special envoy for Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, departed on Sunday on a six-day trip to Libya and Egypt. Aisawa will meet with top government officials of both countries, possibly including Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, and present them with letters from Koizumi, according to the Foreign Ministry. Aisawa plans to express approval of Gadhafi's declaration in December that Libya will abandon weapons of mass destruction and to convey wishes to strengthen bilateral ties. In Egypt, Aisawa will discuss such topics as Middle East peace and Iraq. Aisawa's visit to Libya was initially scheduled in April but was postponed because of an incident in Iraq that month in which three Japanese civilians were taken hostage.

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4. Japan on Reagan's Death

The Japan Times ("NAKASONE MOURNS 'FRIEND OF JAPAN'", 2004-06-07) reported that Japan's prime ministers past and present offered words of tribute Sunday for former US President Ronald Reagan. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said Reagan, who died Saturday, laid the foundation for the Japan-US alliance. Former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone mourned him as a great leader and "a friend of Japan." Nakasone, prime minister from 1982 to 1987, described Reagan as "a great president who led the Cold War against communism to the victory of freedom and democracy." The two leaders maintained close relations through the years, calling each other "Ron" and "Yasu."

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5. Japan-ROK Relations

The Japan Times ("JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA MOVE NERVOUSLY TOWARD CELEBRATION", 2004-0--05) reported that despite announcing the launch of an extensive campaign of cultural, economic and social events to mark next year's 40th anniversary of normalization, Japan and the ROK still seem to have cold feet when it comes to eliminating all the barriers between them. An organizing committee for the Japan side of the Japan-Korea Friendship Year 2005 campaign has been set up, with Ikuo Hirayama, president of the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, serving as its chairman. "At first, 'Japan-Korea Fiesta' was suggested as the name for the campaign," a senior Foreign Ministry official said. "But it was changed because the word 'fiesta' was considered inappropriate for the year 2005, which is also the 100th anniversary of the conclusion of the Japan-Korea Agreement" under which Korea became a protectorate of Japan, the official said. Oriza Hirata, a playwright and a member of the campaign committee, said he fears Japanese ignorance of historical issues could breed conflict once closer exchanges lead to deeper interaction. Hirata noted that most young people in Japan do not understand the significance of March 1, 1919, the date on which 33 Koreans launched a campaign to protest Japan's colonization, leading to a nationwide independence movement. The Japanese side has its reservations as well. While the Foreign Ministry wants to allow South Korean tourists to enter Japan without visas throughout 2005, immigration and police authorities are reluctant to do so, noting that South Koreans comprised the largest group among illegal overstayers in Japan last year. As a compromise, the government will likely offer visa exemptions for several months, the official said.

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