

NAPSNET Week in Review 1 August, 2003

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United States

1. US Response to DPRK Multilateral Talk

The DPRK has agreed to take part in multilateral talks to try to settle the crisis sparked by its nuclear program, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "North Korea has agreed to the multilateral approach that we long sought. That will include six-party talks," McClellan told reporters. "In terms of the actual details and timing, these are still being worked out with our friends and allies," he added. "We intend to continue working closely with other parties to make sure that North Korea completely, visibly and irreversibly eliminates its nuclear weapons program and begins to move to a more normal relationship with its neighbors and the international community," McClellan said.

"US Bush on DPRK Talk Agreement" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, US)

"US Response to DPRK Multilateral Talk" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

"US DPRK Security Concerns 'Concept Paper'" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 30, 2003, US)

2. US Bolton on DPRK 'Hellish Nightmare'

Top US arms negotiator John Bolton has slammed DPRK leader Kim Jong-Il for forcing his people live a "hellish nightmare" as he stepped up a war of words with the DPRK over its nuclear weapons ambitions. The US undersecretary for arms control and international security said Thursday that Kim had to scrap his nuclear weapons drive and was "dead wrong" if he thought developing them would serve to strengthen his regime. "The days of DPRK (DPRK) blackmail are over," Bolton said in a speech to the East Asia Institute, a Seoul-based private think tank. "Kim Jong-Il is dead wrong to think that developing nuclear weapons will improve his security. Indeed the opposite is true." He said Kim lived like royalty while keeping "hundreds of thousands of his people locked in prison camps with millions more mired in abject poverty, scrounging the ground for food. For many in the DPRK, life is a hellish nightmare."

"US Bolton on DPRK 'Hellish Nightmare'" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

3. Bolten on US 'Tough' DPRK Policy

Top US arms negotiator John Bolton said a tough policy toward the DPRK had "paid off" as the DPRK said it had proposed six-way talks to end the nuclear crisis. Just a day after blasting DPRK leader Kim Jong-Il for forcing his people to live a "hellish nightmare" in Seoul, Bolton told reporters in Japan on Friday that his tough speech was part of a coordinated US strategy toward Pyongyang. "Believe me, the speech that I gave was fully cleared," Bolton told a news conference at the US embassy, dismissing suggestions that his fiery attack on Kim represented an uncoordinated diplomatic faux pas by Washington. "The important consequence here is that we have received such encouraging news about the prospects for multilateral discussions," he said.

"Bolten on US 'Tough' DPRK Policy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, US)

4. US Department of Defense PRC Military Power Report

The US Department of Defense issued a report to Congress July 30, 2003 on the PRC's military strategy stating that while the PRC interacts with the US in order to benefit from US trade and technology, "Beijing apparently believes that the US poses a significant long-term challenge," especially with regards to Taiwan. The primary driving force for the PRC's military modernization, the report states, is the PRC's perceived need to prepare "credible military options" to "complicate US intervention" in any potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait. The report, entitled "Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China," was issued under the requirements of Section 1202 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, Public Law 106-65. The full text of the report can be found at:

"US Department of Defense PRC Military Power Report" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 30, 2003, US)

5. US Nuclear Weapons Watchdog Disbandment

A US department of energy panel of experts which provided independent oversight of the development of the US nuclear arsenal has been quietly disbanded by the Bush administration, it emerged yesterday. The decision to close down the national nuclear security administration advisory committee - required by law to hold public hearings and issue public reports on nuclear weapons issues - has come just days before a closed-door meeting at a US air force base in Nebraska to discuss the development of a new generation of tactical "mini nukes" and "bunker buster" bombs, as well as an eventual resumption of nuclear testing. Ed Markey, a Democratic congressman and co-chairman of a congressional taskforce on non-proliferation, said: "Instead of seeking balanced expert advice and analysis about this important topic, the department of energy has disbanded the one forum for honest, unbiased external review of its nuclear weapons policies."

"US Nuclear Weapons Watchdog Disbandment" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

6. US-Australia Terrorist Intelligence Confusion

Australia has openly disputed a US report citing the country as a possible "point of origin" for an al-Qaeda terrorist attack on the US or Europe. The row between the Iraq war allies emerged as officials on both sides sought to dispel confusion sparked earlier this week by a hijacking alert issued by the US Department of Homeland Security. The alert, sent to US airlines, cited new intelligence information indicating Australia was among targets for new suicide hijackings planned by the al-Qaeda group which carried out the September 11 2001 attacks on New York and Washington. Australian officials insisted throughout the day Wednesday that the report was incorrect and that Washington would soon issue an amended advisory omitting the reference to Australia. But US officials publicly stood behind the report for more than 24 hours before clarifying Thursday that the warning should have identified Australia as a possible "point of origin" for a suicide hijacking, not a target.

"US-Australia Terrorist Intelligence Confusion" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

Korean Peninsula

1. DPRK Multilateral Talks Agreement

The DPRK has dropped its demand for one-on-one negotiations with the US and has directly notified key regional players that it is ready to meet them in six-way nuclear crisis talks, ROK officials said. The ROK, Japan, the US, Russia and the PRC received notifications at about the same time from the DPRK, whose latest move triggered optimism that a breakthrough in the nine-month nuclear stand-off was at hand. A senior US official said talks could take place as early as this month. The US State Department said it was "very encouraged" by the development, and Moscow's Deputy Foreign Minister Yury Fedotov said the move "opens the way to a resolution" of the nuclear impasse. Japanese leaders welcomed signs that the DPRK was finally showing flexibility while the ROK foreign ministry said months of tough diplomacy may at last be paying off. ROK officials said the DPRK state had abandoned, at least for now, its long-standing demand for one-on-one talks with the US and was ready to engage directly in six-party talks without a resumption of exploratory three-party talks held in Beijing in April. Officials said details were sketchy but it appeared the DPRK had also dropped all reference to a non-aggression pact.

"DPRK Multilateral Talks Agreement" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, US)

"ROK Confirms DPRK Multilateral Talks Agreement" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, US)

"DPRK Agreement to Multilateral Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

"ROK on DPRK Nuclear Negotiations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

"DPRK Nuclear Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

2. ROK on UN Role in DPRK Nuclear Diplomacy

US undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, John Bolton, held talks with ROK Foreign Minister Yoon Young-Kwan. Bolton met with Yoon Wednesday as the ROK denied the existence of a rift with the US on Washington's drive to bring the nuclear crisis to the United Nations. Bolton earlier insisted that the DPRK's nuclear violations be brought before the UN Security Council, a move certain to infuriate the DPRK. The ROK's Foreign Ministry said Seoul was not opposed to a UN role but took issue with the timing, saying efforts to resolve the crisis through negotiations should be exhausted first. "We are now exerting our efforts for a diplomatic solution. It is better for us to resolve the crisis outside the UN framework at this time," said ministry spokesman Kim Sun-Heung.

"ROK on UN Role in DPRK Nuclear Diplomacy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 30, 2003, US)

"Bolton PRC-DPRK Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

3. US-ROK on DPRK Diplomacy

Senior US and ROK officials indicated the diplomatic drive to bring the DPRK to the negotiating table had stalled after a recent flurry of activity. John Bolton, US undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, said there was little reason for optimism after discussions with PRC vice foreign minister Zhang Yesui. "Am I any more optimistic, no. I'm not any more pessimistic either. I don't know if I've learnt anything that affects my optimism scale one way or the other," he said after day-long discussions Monday on the nine-month-old standoff. He said the PRC, the DPRK's closest ally, had done all it could to facilitate a resumption of talks.

"US-ROK on DPRK Diplomacy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 29, 2003, US)

"US-ROK DPRK Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 29, 2003, US)

"ROK-US Relations on DPRK Nuke Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

4. US-DPRK Relations on DPRK Nuke Issue

The US on July 12 denied reports that the US is considering to offer a formal non-aggression pledge to the DPRK in exchange for the latter's dismantling of its nuclear programs. "I disagree with that characterization. That is not something that is happening," McClellan said at a news briefing, referring to a report by the Washington Post. The Post reported that Bush administration officials are considering granting DPRK formal guarantees it will not come under US attack as part of a verifiable dismantlement of its nuclear facilities. McClellan described the report as inaccurate. "Our position remains the same," he stressed. "We still continue to seek a diplomatic solution working with the countries in the neighborhood," McClellan said, but adding that "all options of course remain on the table."

"US-DPRK Relations on DPRK Nuke Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

5. DPRK on US-ROK War Drill

The DPRK has demanded that massive US-ROK military exercises scheduled for this month be scrapped, warning Seoul that staging the war games could jeopardise inter-Korean relations, the ROK's Unification Ministry said. Kim Ryong-Song, DPRK chief negotiator to ministerial talks with South Korea, sent a message to his southern counterpart, Unification Minister Jeong Se-Hyun, Thursday demanding that joint "Ulchi Focus Lens" drills be called off. Kim expressed regret over what he described as Seoul's bid "to stage nuclear war exercises against the fellow countrymen in league with outsiders to bring dark clouds of a nuclear war" to the Korean peninsula, the Unification Ministry said in a statement.

"DPRK on US-ROK War Drill" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, US)

6. Korean War Armistice Anniversary

Amid warnings of renewed conflict from the DPRK, veterans from 16 nations stood on Cold War's last frontier to mark the anniversary of the 1953 Korean War armistice agreement. "Today is a celebration. It is a great celebration. We celebrate the past, we celebrate the present and we celebrate the future," said General Leon LaPort, commander of US troops in South Korea, in the ceremony overcast with rain. He said peace on in Korea was destroyed by "an ill-fated attempt to unify the peninsula under communist control." About 2,500 representatives, including 900 veterans from the 16 countries of the US-led United Nations fighting force took part in the ceremony at Panmunjom, in the demilitarized zone (DMZ). "ROK on DPRK Nuclear Negotiations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

7. DPRK-ROK Radio Propaganda

The DPRK will halt propaganda broadcasts aimed at the ROK from September -- a move the ROK interprets as a bid to get them to reciprocate. "Through a televised announcement, North Korea announced its plan to halt the anti-South propaganda broadcasts," an official at the policy division of Seoul's Unification Ministry told Reuters. "It appears that they are taking the initiative on this move and thereby urging us to do the same," he said. For decades, DPRK TV and radio have broadcast scathingly critical propaganda about the capitalist South, at times accusing leaders of being greedy womanizers and the ROK people of suffering under US oppression. "DPRK-ROK Radio Propaganda" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 30, 2003, US)

People's Republic of China

1. US on PRC Missile Build-Up

The White House warned on Thursday that the PRC's build-up of ballistic missiles capable of striking Taiwan could destabilize the region, and said it was prepared to sell Taipei the weapons to defend itself. "We've made it very clear that China's rapid build-up of weapons, particularly missiles opposite of Taiwan, is something that is destabilizing," White House spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters. The report said the PRC possesses about 450 short-range ballistic missiles and is expected to add about 75 annually over the next few years. The Pentagon last year had estimated that the PRC possessed 350 of these missiles and would be adding 50 per year. All of these missiles are capable of being used against Taiwan and all are believed to be based in the Nanjing Military Region opposite Taiwan, the report said. "US on PRC Missile Build-Up" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

2. PRC Response to US Missile Report

The PRC lashed out at a Pentagon claim it was building a missile capability across from Taiwan that would enable it to launch a surprise attack, but reiterated that the island must be reunified. "Safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of our territory is every country's undoubted right," the foreign ministry told AFP, and said the Pentagon comments were a ruse to justify the US selling advanced weapons to Taiwan. "The concerned parties in the US spread (rumours of) so-called mainland missile threats to Taiwan in various forms over and over," the ministry said. "The purpose is to make excuses, and create public opinion for (the US) selling advanced weapons to Taiwan. "China expresses strong discontent and firm opposition."

"PRC on US Missile Report" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, US)

3. Bush-Hu on DPRK Nuclear Crisis

US President George W. Bush spoke by telephone to PRC President Hu Jintao, and said "serious progress" was being made in framing an Asian regional solution to the DPRK nuclear crisis. Bush revealed the phone call in a solo White House news conference, and said the move was "part of an ongoing process" to encourage Hu "to stay involved in the process of discussion" with DPRK leader Kim Jong. "I told President Hu that it is very important for us to get Japan and South Korea and Russia involved as well," Bush said. "We are actually beginning to make serious progress about sharing responsibility on this issue, in such a way that I believe will lead to an attitudinal change by Kim Jong Il," he said. "I think that one of the things that is important to understanding North Korea is that the past policy of trying to engage bilaterally didn't work," Bush spoke.

"Bush-Hu on DPRK Nuclear Crisis" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 30, 2003, US)

4. PRC-Russia Space Arms Ban

The the PRC and Russia, with the US clearly in their sights, said Thursday "Star Wars" dangers were growing and called for a quick start to talks on a treaty to ban weapons in space. The two powers delivered their plea at a session of the United Nations-backed Conference on Disarmament just over a year after tabling proposals for a pact, to be known as PAROS, that have met with a cold reception from Washington. "Dire developments augur ill for the issue of PAROS," PRC disarmament ambassador Hu Xiaodi told the 66-nation forum, declaring that efforts were under way to "control and occupy outer space." "The risk of weaponization of outer space is mounting," he added, in remarks that sources close to his delegation said were aimed at the US National Missile Defense (NMD) system due to start up in September next year. Russia's ambassador, Leonid Skotnikov, told the Geneva disarmament forum Thursday that his country remained firmly committed to banning the deployment of weapons in outer space and wanted a moratorium while a treaty was negotiated. "We are ready to take on such a commitment immediately as long as the leading space powers join in a moratorium," he said. Skotnikov also called for renewed efforts to relaunch discussion on confidence-building measures on PAROS -- Preventions of an Arms Race in Outer Space -- that have been stalled for almost a decade.

"PRC-Russia Space Arms Ban" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

5. PRC Domestic Politics

PRC Chairman Mao Zedong started the communist tradition of secret summer retreats to the sea at Beidaihe in the 1950s. His successors Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin kept it alive through the 1980s and 1990s. But the PRC's new leaders headed by President Hu Jintao appear to be putting a stop to the exclusive beach gathering, which over the years saw secret debates over how to retake Taiwan, unfolding power struggles and even discussions about a coup. "They haven't requested that we make any preparations. We hear they aren't coming," a Beidaihe government official told Reuters from the oceanside district in Hebei province, 190 miles east of Beijing.

"PRC Domestic Politics" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 29, 2003, US)

6. Hong Kong Anti-Subversion Law

Hong Kong leader Tung Chee-hwa will meet pro-democracy lawmakers for the first time since massive public protests over a proposed anti-subversion law sparked a political crisis. Tung has pledged to listen more carefully to the demands of the public since the July 1 rally which saw 500,000 people take to streets and forced the government to shelve the legislation that many fear will curb rights and freedoms here. The Monday meeting with the pro-democracy camp, who have been among Tung's fiercest critics, is a key step in the uphill battle the Hong Kong chief executive now faces to win back public confidence.

"Hong Kong Anti-Subversion Law" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

7. PRC-Taiwan Referendum Issue

The PRC has warned any attempt by Taiwan to introduce referenda would escalate tensions between them, reports here said. Two senior PRC officials made the warning while visiting Washington earlier this week. They were in the US capital just ahead of Chiou I-jen, a top aide to Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian, who visited for high-level talks on issues believed to include the referendum plan. Chen Yunlin, director of the PRC's cabinet-level Taiwan Affairs Office, and his deputy Zhou Mingwei met with US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James Kelly during the trip. The visit was confirmed by US Department of State deputy spokesman Philip Reeker, the paper said. Chen and Zhou told the US that President Chen's intention to hold a referendum was a provocative step towards "progressive independence for Taiwan". This would cross the PRC's "red line" of tolerance and cause regional tensions, the report said.

"PRC-Taiwan Referendum Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

"Commentary on Taiwan-Japan Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

8. US-PRC Maritime Screening

US inspectors will screen US-bound cargo containers before they leave PRC ports at Shanghai and Shenzhen. Under the agreement signed Tuesday in Beijing, small teams of US customs inspectors will work with PRC officers to target and prescreen sea containers destined for the US. The agreement is part of the Homeland Security Department's Container Security Initiative, which aims to prevent terrorists from smuggling nuclear and other weapons into US. "This agreement with the People's Republic of China is important for our efforts to protect not only the US, but also our global system of trade," said Robert Bonner, commissioner of the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection. Bonner signed the agreement with the PRC's customs commissioner, Mu Xinsheng. The terms were reached last October when the PRC's former president Jiang Zemin visited President Bush in Crawford, Texas. With the addition of the two PRC ports, 19 of the world's top 20 ports have agreed to join the US initiative.

"US-PRC Maritime Screening" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 29, 2003, US)

9. PRC US Rights Activist Trial

The PRC is preparing a trial against US-based human rights activist Yang Jianli, as the US Senate warned such cases could harm relations between Beijing and Washington. Forty-year-old Yang, who has been in PRC detention for 15 months, is scheduled to appear at a Beijing court Monday on charges of espionage, which in grave cases can lead to the death penalty. "The Senate ... condemns and deplors the ongoing ... detention of Dr Yang Jianli, and calls for his immediate and unconditional release," the US Senate said in a unanimous resolution this week. "The US ... should ensure the government of the People's Republic of China understands that ... the infliction of human rights violations ... will reduce the opportunities for cooperation between the US and the People's Republic of China," it said.

"PRC US Rights Activist Trial" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

"PRC US Activist PRC Trial" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 29, 2003, US)

10. PRC Post-SARS Development

The PRC said it will spend 460 million dollars to patch up its flawed public healthcare system over the next two years, after its holes were vividly exposed during the recent SARS crisis. Most of the money will go towards buying medical equipment, Zhao Zilin, the PRC's health ministry official in charge of financing told a news briefing, the Xinhua news agency reported Friday. One hundred million dollars will be spent this year and a further 361 million next year, Zhao said. Of this year's outlay, 35 million is earmarked for the country's national network for disease control, which played a pivotal role in tackling Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which killed 349 people and infected more than 5,000. At the height of the epidemic, Beijing's hospitals in particular struggled to cope, severely eroding public faith in the health system. Beijing admitted many SARS infections occurred due to insufficient preparedness in hospitals.

"PRC Post-SARS Development" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, US)

11. PRC SARS Death

The PRC recorded one new SARS death in Beijing last weekend, a day before President Hu Jintao publicly declared victory over the disease, according to the Web site of the Health Ministry. The Web site said the death was reported between 10 a.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. Sunday, but not when it occurred. A World Health Organization spokeswoman said Tuesday that Beijing hadn't told the agency about it, but she said most governments now report new SARS data only once a week. Word of the new death didn't appear in state media, which reported prominently on Hu's speech Monday declaring the end of the outbreak a victory for the PRC.

"PRC SARS Death" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 29, 2003, US)

"PRC SARS 'Victory'" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

12. PRC Drought

Parts of the PRC are facing their worst drought in a decade with nearly three million people suffering from water shortages in two provinces alone, state press said. In eastern Zhejiang province, some 1.3 million people are short of drinking water while 200,000 hectares of crops have been damaged, the China Daily said Wednesday. Raging forest fires have also left at least two villagers dead. In central Hunan province, more than 1.5 million people are plagued by the prolonged dry spell which has worsened in recent days with temperatures soaring to 43 degrees Celcius in some areas of the country. Drought conditions have also deteriorated in the south where meteorological officials Tuesday formally issued a red heat warning in Guangdong for the first time ever. Red heat warnings are issued whenever the mercury climbs above 35 degrees Celsius.

"PRC Drought" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 30, 2003, US)

Japan

1. Japan Iraq Troop Deployment

Despite Diet approval of a bill to allow the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel to Iraq, the Japanese government continued to wrestle with exactly when and where the SDF should be sent. "It is possible that Japan may not send the SDF to Iraq at all, depending on the security situation," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said during the final debate on the bill at the Upper House Foreign and Defense Affairs Committee on July 25. When asked by Naoto Kan, leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, to name at least one noncombat area that would be safe enough for SDF personnel, Koizumi admitted that he had no idea. Ruling party lawmakers are also inclined to delay the dispatch until after the next general election of the Lower House -- widely expected to be held in November -- because they could lose votes if SDF personnel are hurt or killed while in Iraq, government sources said. Defense Agency chief Shigeru Ishiba said the timing of the dispatch will be decided only after security conditions become predictable and SDF personnel have been fully trained to handle dangerous situations.

"Japan Iraq Troop Deployment" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, Japan)

"Roles of SDF in Iraqi Reconstruction" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, Japan)

"Japan Iraq Troop Deployment" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, Japan)

"Japan Iraq Troop Deployment" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

2. US-Japan Relations

US President Bush phoned Japan's prime minister Monday to welcome parliament's vote to authorize sending Japanese troops to help in the policing and reconstruction of Iraq. Bush "expressed his respect" to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for his leadership in ensuring the law's passage late Saturday, the Foreign Ministry said. Koizumi replied that the move was one aspect of his commitment to strengthening the Japan-US alliance, the statement said. Media reports have said as many as 1,000 soldiers would be dispatched. White House spokesman Scott McClellan said Bush and Koizumi spoke for about 15 minutes.
"US-Japan Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

3. Japan Troop Dispatch Law

The Japanese Defense Agency is considering creating a standing unit of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) dedicated to peacekeeping, antiterrorism and other overseas operations, agency officials said. The move to set up what is tentatively referred to as an international contribution corps is in line with an earlier suggestion by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi that Japan enact a permanent law authorizing SDF missions abroad, including those not under UN auspices, the officials said. The officials said a standing special corps would allow Japan to respond promptly to the requirements of the international community.
"SDF Permanent Legislation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, Japan)
"Japan Troop Dispatch Law" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 29, 2003, US)

4. PRC-Japan Relations

Top PRC leaders on July 23 called for more non-governmental contact between PRC and Japan. Meeting in Beijing yesterday with a delegation from the Japanese Association of the Dietmen (parliamentarians) League for Japan-PRC Friendship, President Hu Jintao said PRC and Japan should attach much greater importance than ever to non-governmental contacts. The two countries should encourage the younger generation, including young politicians in both countries, to develop greater friendship, he said.
"PRC-Japan Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

5. Japan Earthquake Continuation

A strong quake jolted northern Japan where three powerful earthquakes and some 1,000 aftershocks during the weekend left 560 people injured. Monday's quake, measuring 5.0 on the Richter scale, shook Miyagi prefecture, some 350 kilometers (220 miles) northeast of Tokyo, at 4:08 am (1908 GMT Sunday), an official from the Japan Meteorological Agency said. The quake, which was ten kilometers (6.2 miles) deep, was located in northern Miyagi, and no tidal wave warning was issued after the tremor. There were no immediate reports of injuries.
"Japan Earthquake Continuation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

6. Japan Domestic Economy

Japan's unemployment rate improved to 5.3 percent in June, the government said Tuesday, as this nation limps toward a fragile recovery largely dependent on export growth. Japan's joblessness hovered at 5.4 percent in March, April and May. It marked 5.5 percent - the highest level since the government began keeping track in 1953 - in August and October last year and January this year. It briefly eased to 5.2 percent in February. Much hinges on the US outlook at a time when exports remain the chief engine of Japan's growth. Japanese officials have been cautious about changing their gloomy outlook without clearer signs of US recovery.

"Japan Domestic Economy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 28, 2003, US)

7. Japan DPRK Asylum Seekers

Ten suspected DPRK asylum-seekers taking refuge at the Japanese embassy in Bangkok were being interviewed by a Korean-speaking Japanese official, the embassy said. The ten, including two children, slipped into the embassy on Thursday when the gates were opened for a car to enter, shouting what staff said sounded like "North Korea." Embassy counsellor Akihiko Fujii told AFP that a Japanese official dispatched from Seoul arrived in Bangkok Thursday night and began interviewing the group this morning. "They (the ten) are still at the embassy. They're all okay, they're well. They slept well and ate breakfast, with no problems so far, and we've started interviewing this morning at 8:00 am (0100 GMT)," he said. He said officials were still unable to confirm whether the group were DPRKs seeking asylum.

"Japan DPRK Asylum Seekers" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, US)

"Japan DPRK Asylum Seekers" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

8. Japan Energy Crisis

Japan's electricity industry is in turmoil. This may have a big impact on the world's energy markets. The ministry, which oversees the electricity industry, is gearing up for a power shortage that could leave Tokyo facing unprecedented blackouts this summer, when demand for electricity reaches its peak. The reason: Tokyo Electric Power (Tepco), the world's largest private electricity company, had to close its 17 nuclear reactors after it was caught last September falsifying safety records to hide cracks at some of its power plants. Three have now restarted, but it is unclear when the local authorities will allow others to do so. As these nuclear reactors usually supply almost half the electricity for the region centered on Tokyo, Tepco reckons that it may fall short of expected demand by almost 10% this summer.

"Japan Energy Crisis" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, US)

9. LDP Presidential Election

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will hold its next presidential election Sept. 20, members of the ruling party's election board said. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's term as party president expires at the end of that month. Campaigning will begin September 8. The 355 Diet members from the LDP are each entitled to a full vote. Voting among other LDP members and supporters of the party nationwide -- allocated a combined 300 votes -- will take place between the start of the campaigning period and Sept. 19. Votes will be compiled by the LDP's prefectural chapters. Thus far, no LDP lawmaker has officially declared plans to challenge Koizumi, although dissatisfaction with the prime minister's economic policies remains strong within the ruling party. Former LDP policy chief Shizuka Kamei, one of Koizumi's foremost critics, has stated he is ready to run "if no other candidates emerge."

"LDP Presidential Election" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, Japan)

10. DPJ-Liberal Party Merger

In preparation for the upcoming Lower House general election, top leaders of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the Liberal Party agreed on June 23 that the two opposition parties will merge by the end of September. DPJ President Naoto Kan and his Liberal Party counterpart, Ichiro Ozawa, reached the accord during a meeting at a Tokyo hotel. According to a written memorandum between Kan and Ozawa, the Liberal Party will be disbanded and absorbed by the DPJ, which will be the surviving party. All of the policies, current executive lineup and party code of the DPJ will remain intact, which means the total dissolution of the Liberal Party.

"DPJ-Liberal Party Merger" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, Japan)

11. US Bases in Japan

Japan and the US will meet to try to strike a deal by the July 31 deadline on reviewing criminal procedures for US military personnel accused of crimes, officials of both countries said. The meeting will be held in Honolulu, they said. The US has been calling for improving the rights of accused military personnel by allowing a US government official to be present during interrogations by Japanese police. But Japan has insisted that suspects' human rights are fully protected under Japan's Code of Criminal Procedure. The two countries made little progress at previous two meetings earlier this month.

"US Bases in Japan" (NAPSNet Daily Report, August 1, 2003, Japan)

12. Japan-Australia Relations

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and his visiting Australian counterpart, John Howard, agreed on July 16 to step up cooperation to combat terrorism in Asia. The two leaders issued a joint statement and an attached action plan detailing efforts to strengthen bilateral consultation and cooperation in fighting terrorism by increasing information sharing and helping Asian nations set up anti-terrorism programs.

"Japan-Australia Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, Japan)

13. Japan's Safeguard Measure

Japan's Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on Wednesday dismissed calls from the United States and Canada for Tokyo to withdraw a plan to raise tariffs on chilled beef from Friday in response to a surge in imports. "Considering the whole food situation in Japan, I will make efforts" so that the US and Canada can understand Tokyo's stance, Koizumi told reporters. "We're following the law. It is difficult to change what the government has done so far," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda told reporters earlier Wednesday, saying the plan is in line with the law based on World Trade Organization rules. The Finance Ministry said Tuesday the tariff on chilled beef will be raised to 50% from the current 38.5% from Friday to next March 31 following a surge in imports in the April-June period.

"Japan's Safeguard Measure" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, Japan)

14. Japan ODA Guideline

A group of non-governmental organizations has repeated its demand that the government review a draft guideline on official development assistance, saying the projects should be used to ensure the nation's security and prosperity. ODA Reform Network Tokyo will continue to promote its position before the Cabinet examines the draft in late August, according to Riei Nagase, who heads its secretariat. Nagase also expressed hope that a basic ODA law will be set up to provide a more consolidated framework to deal with ODA matters, saying it is important that a legal framework be devised.

"Japan ODA Guideline" (NAPSNet Daily Report, July 31, 2003, Japan)

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Nautilus Institute

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

nautilus@nautilus.org