

NAPSNET Week in Review 14 March, 2003

Recommended Citation

"NAPSNET Week in Review 14 March, 2003", NAPSNet Weekly Report, March 14, 2003,
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-weekly/napsnet-week-in-review-14-march-2003/>

United States

1. US DPRK Regime Change

US officials talk freely of regime change in Iraq, but not in the DPRK. US-based analysts, however, say some in the US believe the downfall of the DPRK government is the only path to fully dismantling its nuclear programs. For now, the US goal is to muster diplomatic pressure on the DPRK to give up suspected efforts to develop nuclear weapons, while keeping the issue on the back burner until Iraq is resolved. Both countries are part of what President George W. Bush has called an "axis of evil." If international diplomacy fails with the DPRK, economic containment and even the use of force - strategies now in play against Iraq - could emerge as more viable options to destabilize the rule of Kim Jong Il.

"US DPRK Regime Change" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

2. Assistant Secretary James A. Kelly on DPRK Situation

The DPRK can't have nuclear weapons and expect to end its international isolation, says Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James A. Kelly. "Over the past ten years, Pyongyang has been in pursuit of two mutually exclusive goals," Kelly told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee March 12. The first goal of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is nuclear weapons, he said. The DPRK's second goal is "redefining its place in the world community -- and, incidentally its access to international largesse -- by broadening its diplomatic and foreign economic relations." The DPRK "needs to accept that it cannot do both," he said in prepared testimony. Kelly's full report can be found:

"Assistant Secretary James A. Kelly on DPRK Situation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

3. US Domestic Politics

Poised to unleash war on Iraq, the Bush administration is under siege at home and abroad over its failure to ease the growing DPRK nuclear crisis. Critics say the DPRK is far more dangerous than Saddam Hussein, and are worried by President George W Bush's refusal to order direct talks with its leader Kim Jong-il. Bush is also being accused of standing by as the DPRK prepares to crank up a reprocessing plant at Yongbyon which could churn out up to six nuclear bombs by midsummer, according to CIA estimates. William Perry, a former defence secretary who supported the Clinton administration's policy of engagement with the DPRK, has a dire warning for Bush. "The proposed policy of isolation and containment will not work. It can hardly isolate North Korea more than they are already isolated," he said.

"US Domestic Politics" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

4. US Approval of Moscow Treaty

The US Senate March 6 unanimously approved the Moscow Treaty, which will reduce US and Russian long-range nuclear warheads by two-thirds by the year 2012. The treaty, which is formally known as the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, requires the two countries to reduce their deployed nuclear arsenals to between 1,700 and 2,200, down from 6,000 warheads for the US and 5,500 for Russia. The Russian parliament has yet to ratify the treaty, which was signed by Presidents Bush and Vladimir Putin last May in Moscow. "This historic agreement will reduce the nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia to their lowest levels in decades," President Bush said March 7 in a brief statement. "The treaty will benefit both our peoples and contribute to a more secure world. "The Moscow Treaty helps lay to rest the legacies of Cold War competition and suspicion, and marks a fundamentally new era in relations between the US and Russia."

The full text of the treaty may be viewed on the Web at

"Russia-US Nuclear Arms Treaty Ratification" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

"US Approval of Moscow Treaty" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

"US-Russia Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, PRC)

"US-Russia Non-proliferation Accord" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

5. Russia on US DPRK Threats

A senior Russian diplomat warned Wednesday against threatening the DPRK, saying Russia was continuing its quiet diplomacy aimed at reaching a settlement of the crisis around the DPRK's nuclear program. "Russia is definitely against preventive strikes on North Korea and against any military nuclear programs on the Korean peninsula," Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Mamedov said during a visit to Tokyo, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported. He rejected any sanctions levied against the DPRK because of its nuclear program, saying such punishment would only intensify tensions, ITAR-Tass said. "The country has the possibility to create nuclear weapons, but no evidence, except hints, rumors and indirect information, exists that North Korea has such weapons already," Mamedov said.

"Russia on US DPRK Threats" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

6. US on Russia Veto Threat

US officials Thursday softened their warning about the possibility of long-term damage to relations with Russia if Russia vetoes a new U.N. Security Council resolution on Iraq. One senior US official said the US still hoped to persuade Russia not to use its veto but conceded that, "if anything, the indications are more in the other direction." Russia is eager to avoid a war in Iraq that it regards as being against its interests. President Vladimir V. Putin sent a top envoy, former Prime Minister Yevgeny M. Primakov, to Baghdad last month to urge Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to step down and go into exile. Hussein rejected the idea. "It's my understanding that the Russians have been floating that idea," the official said, confirming rumors that have circulated for some time. The official added that Moscow regarded the possibility of Hussein's going into exile as a chance to end the crisis peacefully.

"US on Russia Veto Threat" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

"Russia UN Iraq Resolution Opposition" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

7. US Nuclear Safeguard Plans

The US lacks a comprehensive plan for protecting the world's supply of nuclear material from terrorists, according to a report issued today by Harvard University researchers. The report, titled "Controlling Nuclear Warheads and Materials," is part of a three-year research project commissioned by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a Washington foundation, to create a report card on nuclear security around the world. The nations of the former Soviet Union present the biggest risk, the report said, given their vast supply of nuclear material and deteriorating financial state. The report said the amount of nuclear material needed to create a bomb was insignificant compared with what is available worldwide.

"US Nuclear Safeguard Plans" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

Korean Peninsula

1. DPRK Missile Fire Test

The DPRK test-fired a cruise missile into the Sea of Japan at around noon on Monday (10 p.m. EST Sunday), the ROK's Defense Ministry said, in what appeared to be the latest provocative step in a crisis over the DPRK's suspected nuclear ambitions. "The missile was fired around noon today on the Sea of Japan, and we judged it was the same type as was test-fired on February 24," a defense ministry spokesman said by telephone. "We are still looking to find out exactly what type of missile it was," he said. On February 24, it shot an anti-ship missile into the same waters.

"DPRK Missile Exercise" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 11, JAPAN)

"DPRK Missile Fire Test" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

2. US DPRK Nuclear Program Warning

The US has warned that the DPRK's nuclear weapons program may be much further advanced than previously thought. US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly said that the DPRK's uranium enrichment program could be months away from producing weapons-grade material. The DPRK has apparently already re-started its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon and could soon be reprocessing nuclear fuel into plutonium - another way of making nuclear bombs. Some members of the US administration say the DPRK may already possess one or two nuclear bombs. The BBC's state department correspondent Jon Leyne says experts believe the DPRK could soon have a production line able to produce up to a bomb a month. "US DPRK Nuclear Program Warning" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

3. DPRK on US Plane Interception

The US filed a formal complaint with DPRK over its interception of a US reconnaissance plane. After the midair challenge by four North Korean fighter jets against an US spy plane on March 2, the White House said it would officially protest the event. "We delivered an oral protest through the New York channel on Monday," a US State Department spokesman said Monday. DPRK continued to criticize US surveillance activities. The DPRK sought to justify its interception of the US spyplane by four fighter jets in international airspace as a defensive act. "We can not stand by and watch the aggressive attempts by the US army," said a commentary in the Rodong Sinmun newspaper.

"US-DPRK Confrontation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, ROK)

"US DPRK Plane Interception Protest" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

"DPRK's Criticism on ROK's Response to Plane Interception" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 11, ROK)

"DPRK on US Plane Interception" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

"Nations' Response towards the US-DPRK Air Confrontation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, PRC)

4. US DPRK Spy Flights

US spy planes will soon resume surveillance flights off the DPRK, following an aerial interception by MiGs from the DPRK 10 days ago, according to US military sources. But policymakers have rejected the idea of sending an armed fighter escort, believing that would increase the risk of hostilities with the DPRK. Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, would not discuss details of the flights, but said: "We will conduct legal and lawful missions in international airspace around the world. They are innocent and non-threatening, and they will continue."

"US DPRK Spy Flights" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

5. US-ROK Military Exercises

Six of the planes arrived Thursday in the ROK, ostensibly to participate in annual exercises dubbed Eagle, Foal Eagle and RSOI. Kunsan Air Base commander Col. Guy Dahlbeck insists their return is not meant to send a message to Pyongyang or up the stakes in the standoff.

"We are just here for exercises," said stealth pilot Lt. Col. Jay Lake, standing in front of one of the matte black, bat-winged planes in a hangar on the southwestern coast of South Korea.

"Our job is not to weigh the political issues." But with their 2,000 pound, laser-guided bombs, a sortie of F-117A Nighthawks could take out the DPRK's Yongbyon nuclear plant in one day or less - an attack the DPRK has accused Washington of plotting. "Whether it's intended as a message or not, it will be received as that," said Ralph Cossa, president of the Pacific Forum, a Hawaii-based foreign policy think tank.

"US Stealth Fighters ROK Visit" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

"DPRK on Foal Eagle Military Exercise" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

"DPRK Response to ROK-US Exercise" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

"US-ROK Military Exercises" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

"US-ROK War Games" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, PRC)

6. US Carrier ROK Deployment

A US aircraft carrier deployed off the ROK's coast Friday ahead of a major bilateral military exercise being planned despite objections by the DPRK. The announcement came a day after Japan's Defense Agency said it had deployed an Aegis-equipped destroyer - which includes top-of-the-line surveillance systems and ship-to-air missiles - in the waters between Japan and the DPRK.

"US Carrier ROK Deployment" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

"DPRK Response to US Carrier Deployment" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

7. DPRK-US Relations

A top State Department official says US-DPRK negotiations cannot resume until the DPRK agrees to eliminate its nuclear weapons programs and meets US requirements in four other areas. In addition to nuclear disarmament, Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly said Wednesday that the DPRK also must protect human rights, address US concerns about terrorism, cease the export of missiles and reduce conventional forces that target the ROK. Only then would the US be willing to take steps to "improve the lives of the North Korean people" and to establish normal relations, he said. There is a sense of urgency because the DPRK, already believed to have one or two nuclear weapons, could have several more by summer if it begins reprocessing existing stocks of plutonium. By restarting a nuclear reactor two weeks ago, the DPRK is in position to accumulate additional plutonium supplies which could lead to nuclear weapons.

"DPRK-US Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

"DPRK on DPRK-US Direct Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

"US-DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, PRC)

8. ROK-US Relations

Foreign Minister Yoon Young-kwan said Wednesday that President Roh Moo-hyun would visit US in late April or early May, and that he would meet with US Secretary of State Colin Powell late this month to pave the way for Roh's visit. Speaking in a radio interview, Yoon also said that ROK preferred a multilateral approach to the North Korean nuclear problem, as does US, but that ROK wanted talks between US and DPRK to take place within such a framework. On the possible relocation of US forces in ROK, Yoon said that discussions on the issue would start next month and that the government's position was that the deterrence factor of the forces and security pledges need to be maintained. The ROK-US relationship should develop into a mature one between two democracies, and changes along those lines should appear within a year, he said.

"ROK-US on DPRK Development" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

"ROK-US Relations Overview" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, ROK)

9. ROK on DPRK Multilateral Talks

The ROK on Wednesday urged the US and the DPRK to use both direct talks and multilateral channels to resolve the standoff over the DPRK's nuclear programs. The DPRK has repeatedly said it wants to talk only with the US. But the US prefers to settle the dispute through multilateral pressure, saying the nuclear programs threaten not just US interests but also those of Russia, the PRC, Japan and the ROK. "Our position is the two sides should pursue both ways," Prime Minister Goh Kun said in a speech at a meeting with economic leaders. "Based on this, the (South) Korean government will do its best to settle the problem peacefully in close coordination with the US." Goh's remarks came after the ROK's foreign minister said Wednesday that the US needs to do more to resolve the nuclear dispute.

"ROK on US-DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

"ROK on DPRK Multilateral Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

"Bilateral or Multilateral with DPRK?" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 11, ROK)

10. The Second Threat, DPRK

According to a report out of US this week by the polling company Zogby, USs consider Al Qaida the most dangerous threat in the world. Thirty-two percent of the respondents said Al Qaida represented the biggest danger, followed by DPRK at 30 percent and Iraq at 22 percent. The poll was conducted March 5-7. Support for a war against Iraq rose to 57 percent from last month's 54 percent. President George W. Bush's approval rating dropped slightly, to 54 percent from 57 percent. The poll also showed that 62 percent of whites support the war, while 75 percent of blacks oppose it. The Republicans overwhelmingly support the war, at 84 percent. Independents are split at 52 percent, while only 35 percent of Democrats support it.

"The Second Threat, DPRK" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, ROK)

11. US on ROK-US Military Alliance

The alliance between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the US will endure, despite recent tensions, says the top US commander of military forces on the Korean Peninsula. "The Republic of Korea-US alliance has weathered challenges for over 50 years, and this partnership will continue to endure," General Leon J. LaPorte told the Senate Armed Services Committee in prepared remarks March 13, 2003. LaPorte is the commander of the United Nations Command, Republic of Korea-US Combined Forces Command, and the US Forces Korea. Some 37,000 US soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines and 5,700 civilian employees work under his authority. The General noted that while anti-Americanism was highly evident during the ROK presidential elections, anti-US forces demonstrations have "virtually disappeared" since December 2002, when President Roh Moo-Hyun was elected.

The entire text of LaPorte's 29-page prepared testimony can be found on the Senate Armed Services Committee's website at:

"US on ROK-US Military Alliance" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

12. ROK Anti-Americanism

The anti-American demonstrations here have suddenly gone poof. US soldiers are walking the streets of Seoul again without looking over their shoulders. The official line from the ROK government is: Yankees stay here. Opposition to US troops in the ROK that seemed to be boiling over has quieted dramatically in recent weeks, because of new threats from the DPRK and a suggestion from Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld that US troops may be cut and repositioned. Resentment toward the US government, however, has hardly disappeared.

Outside the heavily guarded gate of the main US military compound in Seoul, protesters sit daily with a loudspeaker blasting the English words "[Expletive] America!" over the camp.

"ROK Anti-Americanism" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

13. ROK DPRK "Secret Payment" Investigation

ROK President Roh Moo Hyun assented today to a law authorizing a special prosecutor to investigate whether several hundred million dollars in payments were made to the DPRK to induce its leader, Kim Jong Il, to hold a summit meeting in June 2000 with the ROK president at the time, Kim Dae Jung. Roh, yielding to pressure from the opposition Grand National Party, which holds a majority in the National Assembly, said he would not veto the bill, as demanded by members of his own Millennium Democratic Party. Roh said leaders of both major parties had agreed that a special prosecutor should conduct the investigation "so as not to damage the national interest or inter-Korean relations." At the same time, he said, there was "wide agreement among the Korean people that the investigation should uncover the facts surrounding the cash transfer."

"ROK DPRK "Secret Payment" Investigation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

14. ROK Domestic Economy

The ROK's central bank has pumped 2 trillion won (£744m; \$1.6bn) into financial markets, in an attempt to combat jitters over the DPRK and a multi-billion-dollar corporate scandal. ROK shares and the won have fallen sharply in recent days, as investors worried that more corporate malpractice could be uncovered after a \$1.2bn accounting scandal at conglomerate SK Group. The SK affair came at a time when tensions with communist North Korea have hit a peak. Fears of widespread defaults on corporate bonds were the immediate trigger for the central bank's intervention, but the ROK is also struggling to maintain the country's credit rating.

"ROK Domestic Economy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

15. DPRK Japan Humanitarian Funds

The DPRK exported \$225.62 million worth of goods, or about 27 percent of its total to Japan in 2001. North Koreans living in Japan send the DPRK about \$85 million a year, experts estimate. In the 1990s, before Japan's recession, the figure went as high as \$700 million a year. Latest customs figures say 2,473 pounds of methamphetamines from the DPRK were seized in the three years through 2001 - second only to the 3,916 pounds from the PRC. Authorities suspect - without proof - that the DPRK government has been printing fake yen. Last year police raided a DPRK ship after one of its crew members allegedly used a counterfeit 10,000 yen bill (\$80) to buy a bicycle. Japanese police confiscated \$140,000 worth of in fake bills in 2002, though were unable to identify their origin.

"DPRK Japan Humanitarian Funds" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

16. DPRK's Criticism against Grand National Party

The DPRK said Monday that the Grand National Party had sent a secret envoy to DPRK before last year's presidential election. DPRK said the unnamed party representative had promised generous support if it took control of the Blue House. On its Japanese Web site DPRK's state-run Korean Central News Agency printed a lengthy statement by DPRK's Asia Pacific Peace Committee with that charge, although the bulk of the statement concerned the controversial transfer of \$500 million from the Hyundai Group to DPRK. The statement, dated Sunday but released Monday, said ROK conservatives had "absurdly" linked the deal with the June 2000 inter-Korean summit.

"DPRK's Criticism against Grand National Party" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 11, ROK)

17. ROK Support to Iraq War

The US wants ROK's help against Iraq, the Blue House spokeswoman said. Song Kyoung-hee said Monday, "The senior advisor for national security, Ra Jong-yil, reported to the president Tuesday that US has asked for active support. The request is for ROK to declare its support, provide medical support and help with refugees." Maureen Cormak, the US Embassy spokeswoman, said she would not comment on the substance of government-to-government dialogue, but said the subject of ROK support on Iraq had been discussed with ROK over the New Year holiday. Ra reportedly advised the president that the administration should make a show of support for its ally. He added that US considers DPRK nuclear issue a regional, not a global concern.

"ROK Support to Iraq War" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 11, ROK)

People's Republic of China

1. PRC on DPRK-US Diplomacy

PRC Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan talked about the DPRK nuclear issue on March 6 at the press conference - held on the sideline of the ongoing first session of the 10th National People's Congress (NPC). He said that PRC hopes the US and the DPRK could hold dialogue to solve the nuclear crisis. Any pressure or sanctions put on the DPRK will only "complicate the situation in the peninsula" and is not conducive to the solution of the DPRK nuclear issue, said Tang. He said PRC's basic stance on the DPRK nuclear issue is that the Korean Peninsula should be denuclearized so as to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula. "No matter from the historical point of view or the view of reality, the most effective means to resolve the issue is to realize direct dialogue," said Tang.

"PRC's Diplomatic Policy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, PRC)

2. PRC Role in DPRK-US Talks

The PRC is trying to bring the US and the DPRK together for talks and doesn't want the Security Council involved at this stage, the PRC's U.N. ambassador said. The US has been trying to get the five permanent council members to agree on a statement that would condemn the DPRK for withdrawing from a global nuclear arms control treaty and would call on the DPRK to comply with its international obligations, diplomats said. But the PRC has refused to attend the meetings. Russia, another ally of the DPRK, also hasn't been enthusiastic about bringing the DPRK nuclear dispute before the Security Council.

"PRC Role in DPRK-US Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

3. PRC on UN DPRK Involvement

The PRC argued on Thursday against US efforts to bring the DPRK nuclear crisis to the U.N. Security Council, calling instead for direct talks between the US and the DPRK. "At present, it is not appropriate for the United Nations to be involved in resolving the nuclear issue of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan said. At the United Nations, Security Council diplomats who demanded anonymity said the PRC had blocked efforts to reach agreement among the five permanent council members on a statement that would condemn the DPRK's decision to pull out of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. The PRC supports the DPRK call for direct talks with the US, but the US rejects the demand as a ploy to extract more economic concessions.

"PRC on UN DPRK Involvement" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

4. PRC Domestic Power Change

The PRC completes a sweeping change of leadership this weekend, handing power to a new generation in votes that will see Communist Party chief Hu Jintao inherit Jiang Zemin's robes of state but not his military cudgel. In the culmination of a reshuffle that began last November, the National People's Congress, or parliament, is due to elect Hu, 60, as president on Saturday, replacing Jiang, 76, who must step down after the maximum two five-year terms. Vice Premier Wen Jiabao, 60, is set to take over 74-year-old Premier Zhu Rongji's post on Sunday, along with the headaches of swelling unemployment, rural discontent and a widening gap between rich and poor. But Jiang is widely expected to retain chairmanship of the Central Military Commission, the PRC's top military job, and rule from "behind the curtain" after retirement. Jiang handed the Communist Party leadership to Hu in a generational change of guard last November -- the first orderly succession since the Communists swept to power in 1949.

"PRC Domestic Power Change" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

"PRC Li Peng Retirement" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

5. Cross-Straits Relations

A legislator on Wednesday defended the PRC's deployment of missiles near rival Taiwan, saying they were meant to prevent foreign meddling in PRC affairs, not to threaten the self-ruled island. US and Taiwanese officials say the PRC has deployed about 400 missiles along its southern coast, directly across from Taiwan - which lies 160 kilometers (100 miles) east of the mainland. The officials and analysts say the missiles are intended to scare Taiwanese away from seeking a permanent split from the PRC. During a news conference Wednesday with the delegation picked by Beijing to represent Taiwan, a Taiwanese reporter asked why the PRC has pointed missiles at a territory that it calls its own.

"Cross-Straits Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

6. PRC-US Relations

The PRC accused the US on Friday of sending a military delegation to Taiwan to discuss weapons sales and warned that such trips could damage US-PRC relations. The US is the only major nation that risks angering the PRC by selling advanced arms to Taiwan. PRC leaders argue that the US weapons sales embolden Taiwanese independence supporters and delay the PRC's goal of eventual unification. The official Xinhua News Agency quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan as saying a Pentagon official, whom he did not identify, has gone to Taiwan to discuss anti-missile cooperation and weapons sales. "Warning that this move would send the wrong signals to Taiwan independence forces, Kong urged the US to clearly recognize the damage it could cause on such a sensitive issue," the report said.

"PRC-US Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

7. PRC National People's Congress on Economic Restructuring

The PRC's parliament has approved sweeping changes to the way the government is run, to help it cope with economic and social changes underway in the world's most populous nation. The plan, which was outlined last week, aims to streamline the PRC's ministerial system and monitor its financial policies as the country opens more of its markets to the wider world. The changes were approved by the country's National People's Congress (NPC), which is meeting in Beijing's Great Hall of the People. The State Development Planning Commission, which used to be entrusted with carrying out the traditional five-year economic plans, is to be renamed the State Development and Reform Commission, reflecting the PRC's wish to be seen as a market-driven rather than a planned economy. The Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (Moftec) and the State Economic and Trade Commission will merge to form the Ministry of Commerce, in order to conform with World Trade Organisation requirements. A Banking Regulatory Commission will be set up to regulate the PRC's banking industry, and a new State Food and Drug Administration will oversee safety supervision and the administration of food, drugs, cosmetics and health supplements. The vast majority of delegates at the National People's Congress endorsed the proposal, with just 88 out of over 3,000 delegates opposing it. But some said the downsizing was not enough. "We hope the reforms will go even deeper. There are still many ministries that need to be adjusted," said Dai Lili from central Hubei province.

"PRC Domestic Economy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

"PRC National People's Congress on Economic Restructuring" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

8. PRC Environmental Spending

The PRC has to boost spending on its environment by billions of dollars a year if it hopes to stop further deterioration of its badly polluted air and water, a senior official said Friday. The PRC now spends about 115 billion yuan (US\$14 billion) a year on environmental protection, or about 1.2 percent of its economic output, said Xie Zhenhua, director of the State Environmental Protection Administration. But he said that figure must rise by at least 25 percent to cope with the problems of a densely populated, rapidly developing country. Emissions of major pollutants have dropped over the past five years, but the PRC's total output of waste is still 50 percent more than its environment can bear, Xie said, without giving details. "We are still faced with a rather severe environmental situation," Xie said. "PRC Environmental Spending" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

9. Hong Kong Super-Flu

Singapore and Taiwan have warned citizens against traveling to Hong Kong amid fears over the spread of a deadly flu. Singapore has also urged its population not to travel to Hanoi in Vietnam or the PRC's Guangdong province "unless absolutely necessary." In Hong Kong, officials have urged the public not to panic saying they are doing everything possible to contain the virus. They have said the virus can only be contracted through close contact with someone already infected. They have also dismissed claims the virus could have been unleashed by terrorists. Critically ill So far, dozens of suspected cases of atypical community-acquired pneumonia (CAP) have been reported in Hong Kong and Vietnam. Some of these people are now critically ill. The cases appear to be confined to medical staff or people who had been in close contact with others who were infected. The source of the outbreak is not known.

"Hong Kong Super-Flu" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

Japan

1. Japan on UN Iraq Resolution

Japan has come out strongly in favor of the US and UK position on Iraq in recent days. The prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, has been calling Security Council members to try to persuade them to support a new resolution. But with public opinion overwhelmingly opposed to war without UN backing, the government finds itself in an increasingly difficult position. Nonetheless, Japan is actively trying to win over swing votes on the Security Council. Koizumi is eager to show the US that Japan is doing all it can to help - within the limits of the constitution. Most analysts believe Koizumi has little choice. Japan depends on US forces for its own security and the growing nuclear threat from the DPRK has reminded the Japanese of their own acute vulnerability.

"Japan on UN Iraq Resolution" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

"Japan on War against Iraq" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, JAPAN)

"Japan on UN Iraq Resolution" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

"Japan on War against Iraq" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 11, JAPAN)

"Japan on War against Iraq" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, JAPAN)

"Japan on UN Iraq Resolution" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

2. Anti-war Movement in Japan

In another attempt to stop a possible US-led war on Iraq, a loosely united coalition of 47 Japanese groups is waging a one-week campaign that organizers hope will culminate in one of the biggest protests in recent years. The campaign kicked off on March 2, 2003 in Hiroshima, where about 6,000 people, including Mayor Tadatashi Akiba, stood in formation to spell out "NO WAR NO DU," a reference to depleted uranium, which was used by US forces in shells and bullets during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. About 40,000 people gathered in Tokyo's Hibiya Park on Saturday to protest a possible war against Iraq, organizers said, claiming it was the largest demonstration in Japan since the 1980s. Ken Takada, one of the organizers, took to the stage to describe the war as a threat to democracy. "Yet even more unforgivable is (Prime Minister Junichiro) Koizumi offering unconditional support to the United States," he added.

"Anti-war Movement in Japan" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, JAPAN)

3. Japan Role in Iraq War

Japan is considering airlifting relief materials and providing medical services in case a US-led war in Iraq creates a wave of refugees, government officials said Wednesday. The assistance is being considered as part of international humanitarian activities under the country's legislation designed for U.N. peacekeeping operations. Japan is limiting its role to providing aid partly because of the region's sensitivity to foreign troops, the officials said.

"Japan Role in Iraq War" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, US)

4. Japan DPRK Economic Sanctions

Japan has threatened to impose economic sanctions on the DPRK if it tests a ballistic missile, according to government officials quoted by Japanese media. The DPRK has tested two short range missiles in recent weeks, prompting speculation it is preparing to launch a longer-range version similar to one it fired over Japan in 1998. Japanese government sources said possible sanctions would include a halt to cash transfers and exports to the DPRK, according to the Kyodo news agency and leading newspapers. Japan's exports to the DPRK totaled about \$135m in 1999, while cash transfers from Japan's sizeable Korean community are also thought to be significant.

"Japan DPRK Economic Sanctions" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

"Japan-DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 11, JAPAN)

5. Japan on DPRK Ballistic Missile Reports

Japan government officials refused to comment Thursday on reports that the DPRK may be preparing to launch a Nodong ballistic missile, which can strike almost anywhere in Japan. "We have varied information, but I should not talk about it," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told reporters in the afternoon. Nodong missiles have an estimated range of 1,300 km. The Yomiuri Shimbun reported Thursday morning that the government has received information from the US military in Japan, gathered mainly via satellite, that DPRK military vehicles are gathering at several Nodong missile launch sites.

"Japan on DPRK Ballistic Missile Reports" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

6. Japan Missile Defense Plans

As concerns mount over the threat the DPRK poses to East Asia, Japan says it is considering upping its missile defense systems. "The government is investigating and considering both legal and budgetary issues regarding missile defense," Defense Agency spokesman Ichiro Imaizumi said on Friday. While Imaizumi declined to comment further, the Yomiuri Shimbun daily reported that Japan plans to buy advanced US-made Patriot anti-missile rockets to deploy from July. Under the new missile defense plan being considered, if the DPRK fired a mid-range Rodong missile at Japan, Japan would be able to intercept it with an enhanced version of the Patriot PAC2, the Yomiuri report said. Those Patriots would be able to intercept ballistic missiles with a range of 1,000 kilometers (620 miles). At the moment Japan has less advanced Patriot anti-missile rockets in place at 27 locations around the country, but they have a shorter range. To be able to respond to any missile, Japan is also considering revising the law to enable the military to launch a Patriot rocket before being given orders to do so by the prime minister, the Yomiuri added.

"Japan Missile Defense Plans" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 14, US)

7. Japan Domestic Economy

Japan's government scrambled to shore up confidence on Monday as Japanese shares fell to their lowest in 20 years, raising the specter of a financial crisis as the fiscal year-end approaches. Fears of an imminent war in Iraq and tension over the DPRK helped drive the benchmark Nikkei 225 share average to 8,042.26, its lowest since March 1983 and around a fifth of its value at its peak in 1989. In what markets took to be a sign the government finally seems to be at last gaining a sense of urgency, officials rushed to reassure investors over the health of the world's second-largest economy. "The fall in stock prices would have no long-term effect on the economy, and the nation's financial system is stable," Economics and Financial Services Minister Heizo Takenaka stated.

"Japan Domestic Economy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

8. Japan Spy Satellite

The head of Japan's space agency said Monday the launch of Japan's first spy satellites later this month poses no threat to the DPRK, but acknowledged it was politically "sensitive" and that security was being increased. "To me as an engineer, it is a very ordinary launch," Shuichiro Yamanouchi, head of the National Space Development agency, NASDA, told a news conference. "But the government is very sensitive." Japan is to launch two information-gathering satellites on March 28 from the Tanegashima Space Center on a remote island on its southern fringes. Few details about the spy satellites have been released, and even the launch date was kept secret until just recently.

"Japan Spy Satellite" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 10, US)

9. Japan Surveillance DPRK Ship

Japan has sent a high-tech surveillance warship to the Sea of Japan, the Defense Agency said Thursday, amid reports that the DPRK may soon test an intermediate-range ballistic missile. Defense Agency spokesman Yoshiyuki Ueno confirmed that the Aegis-equipped destroyer - which includes top-of-the-line surveillance systems and ship-to-air missiles - was deployed to the waters between Japan and the DPRK. Ueno described its mission as part of regular patrol activities. Another agency official, Ichiro Imaizumi, later said the vessel left port last Friday.

"Japan Surveillance DPRK Ship" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, US)

10. Human Shields in Iraq

The Iraqi Embassy in Tokyo issued visas Tuesday to eight Japanese headed for Iraq to serve as "human shields," even as the US and its allies move ever closer to war with Saddam Hussein. Visa applications for six others have also been dispatched to Iraq. More than 25 visa applications have been received in total. A Japanese Foreign Ministry official said while the individuals may be well-intentioned, entrance into Iraq at this point is suicidal. However, an Iraqi Embassy official in Tokyo said, "We respect the intentions of the applicants who want to enter the country despite the imminent dangers. [...] The visitors will be welcomed as human shields. Their duration of stay is not specified, as it will be extended until the war is evaded." While there are new volunteers still trying to enter the country, the main human shield "program" has essentially collapsed, with "shields" either expelled by Iraq or fleeing the country on their own initiative.

"Human Shields in Iraq" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, JAPAN)

11. Japan's Role in Anti-terrorism

Japan is ready to play a major role in combating international terrorism amid growing fears over Islamic radicals, as a US-led war to disarm Iraq will certainly raise the ire of Muslim-dominated countries. The US has already asked Japan to act when Cofer Black, the US ambassador-at-large in charge of countering terrorism, attended a ministerial-level meeting on anti-terror measures in Tokyo in late February. If the US attacks Iraq, anti-American sentiment would probably explode in Indonesia, and because the US could find trouble acting there, it needs Japan's help, Black was quoted as telling top Japanese Foreign Ministry officials.

"Japan's Role in Anti-terrorism" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, JAPAN)

12. US Bases in Japan

Two shells were launched at the US Air Force's Yokota Air Base in Fussa, Tokyo, in what police said appeared to be a guerrilla attack. Investigators found two launching devices about 300 meters away from the base, along with wires, batteries, and a timing device. In a similar incident on March 11, a timed launching device was found in the grounds of a school in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward, pointed in the direction of the Defense Agency about 300 meters away. Police said it was likely extremists had planted the device.

"US Bases in Japan" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 13, JAPAN)

13. Japanese Logistic Support in the Arabian Sea

The Japanese Cabinet agreed Tuesday to expand the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) refueling activities in the Indian Ocean to include vessels from Italy, the Netherlands and Spain as part of Japan's logistic support for US-led military operations in Afghanistan. The latest expansion is apparently aimed at helping the US forces in Afghanistan while the US prepares for a war on Iraq.

"Japanese Logistic Support in the Arabian Sea" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 12, JAPAN)

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