

NAPSNET Week in Review 21 February, 2003

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United States

1. Powell NE Asia Tour

US Secretary of State Colin Powell is expected to travel to Japan, the PRC and the ROK this week for talks on the DPRK's suspected nuclear weapons program, US officials said on Wednesday. The trip, which has yet to be formally announced by the State Department, is also likely to cover the US push for a possible war against Iraq, which the PRC has resisted, arguing that UN weapons inspectors should have more time to search for Baghdad's suspected weapons of mass destruction programs. Powell is expected to make stops in Tokyo and Beijing on his way to Seoul, where he is expected to attend the February 25 inauguration of ROK President-elect Roh Moo-hyun.

"Powell NE Asia Tour" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

Korean Peninsula

1. DPRK 1953 Armistice Withdrawal

The DPRK threatened on February 18, 2003 to abandon the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War and accused the US of plotting an attack. A spokesman for the Korean People's Army asserted that the US was building up reinforcements around the Korean Peninsula in preparation for an attack, said the Korean Central News Agency. "The situation is, therefore, getting more serious as the days go by as it is putting its plan for preemptive attacks on the [North] into practice," the agency quoted the unidentified spokesman as saying. The announcement is the latest move in a crisis over the DPRK's recent decision to restart nuclear programs that are in violation of international treaties. The DPRK's threat came a day after a declaration by the DPRK that it would triumph in the nuclear standoff.

"DPRK 1953 Armistice Withdrawal" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

"US-DPRK Diplomatic Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

2. Response to DPRK Armistice Withdrawal

The ROK shrugged off a threat by the DPRK today to abandon the armistice agreement that ended the 1950-53 Korean War. Officials in the ROK said the dispute over the DPRK's nuclear program is not as dangerous as some people in the US believe. "I believe the danger of war on the Korean Peninsula is slight -- in fact, nonexistent," ROK President Kim Dae Jung told his cabinet this morning, according to a statement from his office. Kim did not mention the armistice threat specifically, a spokesman said.

The US has described the DPRK's threat to abandon the Korean War armistice as "rather predictable." "What you've seen is a rather predictable series of escalatory statements from North Korea," said White House spokesman Ari Fleischer. He was speaking after the DPRK said it would no longer feel obliged to observe the armistice which halted the 1950-53 war in response to what it called US violations of the truce. A US State Department official said the DPRK was going about things the wrong way if it wanted direct talks with the US. "The US will not respond to threats, broken commitments or blackmail by North Korea," he said. "Any further escalation by North Korea of the situation on the peninsula will bring international condemnation and further self-isolation."

Japan DPRK Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda called for calm Tuesday following the DPRK's threat to abandon the Korean War armistice if the US imposes sanctions on it. "It is in line with (Pyongyang's) way of thinking, that views sanctions as an act of war," the government spokesman told a news conference. "We must take it calmly." Earlier Tuesday, the DPRK said it has "no option but to take a decisive step to abandon its commitment" to the 1953 Korean War armistice if the US imposes sanctions in retaliation for its development of nuclear weapons.

"ROK on DPRK Armistice Withdrawal Threat" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US) "ROK on Inter-Korean War" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

"US on DPRK Armistice Withdrawal Threat" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

3. DPRK Nuclear Development

Japan's Defense Agency's Chief of Military Intelligence, Fumio Ota, came to the conclusion in a briefing to parliamentarians last week: DPRK President Kim Jong Il wants nukes, not some new carrots from the West. For North Asia, that renders irrelevant the debate over who is a bigger threat to the world-Kim Jong Il or far-off Saddam Hussein. If the DPRK gets a nuclear armory, technologically advanced Japan and the ROK will also be tempted to build atom bombs. And Kim, with his boilersuits and bouffant hairdo, could succeed in dismantling the whole postwar security structure of the region and the attendant and prosperous economic ties that peace has fostered. As the CIA's Tenet told the Senate Intelligence Committee last week: "The domino theory of the 21st century may well be nuclear."

The full story can be found here:

"DPRK Nuclear Development" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

"Development of DPRK's Nuke Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, PRC)

4. ROK on US DPRK Military Action

ROK president-elect Roh said Wednesday he would oppose any consideration of US military action to force the DPRK to halt its suspected nuclear weapons development. US President George W. Bush has said he prefers a diplomatic solution to the standoff over the DPRK's nuclear activities, but has also maintained that "all options are on the table." Roh Moo-hyun, who takes office on February 25, told members of the Korean Chamber of Commerce that he was "willing to differ with the United States if that helps prevent war. An attack on North Korea could trigger a war engulfing the entire Korean Peninsula," Roh said. "It's a serious issue, and at this moment I am against even consideration of such an option."

"ROK on US DPRK Military Action" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

5. US on DPRK Economic Sanctions

The Bush administration is developing plans for sanctions against the DPRK, that would include halting its weapons shipments and cutting off money sent there by Koreans living in Japan, in the event that the DPRK continues its march toward developing nuclear weapons, senior administration officials say. The officials said late last week the administration had no plans to push for the sanctions soon, since the US' Pacific allies still oppose the idea and the United Nations Security Council is likely to remain focused on Iraq for weeks. But the Pentagon and State Department are developing detailed plans for sanctions, and perhaps other actions, so that the US has a forceful response ready in case the DPRK takes aggressive new steps toward developing nuclear weapons, senior officials said.

"US on DPRK Economic Sanctions" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

6. DPRK Humanitarian Crisis

The DPRK could soon face another deadly famine unless foreign donors resume food supplies cut off because of the current nuclear standoff, a leading aid official said Wednesday. "The people are living on the edge. It doesn't need much until we could slip back into the hunger of 1995-1997," Kathi Zellweger of the charity Caritas Hong Kong said upon her return from the isolated country. Zellweger, one of the few foreigners allowed to visit the DPRK regularly, said the country began to suffer huge cutbacks in foreign aid when US officials confronted the DPRK over its alleged nuclear program. "The political tensions now of course are making donors think more carefully," she said. "We have to continue as we are helping people in need, and we do not like to mix humanitarian aid and politics." The United Nations says donors have only provided 6.7 percent of the US\$225 million in supplies the DPRK sought so far this year.

"DPRK Humanitarian Crisis" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

7. ROK Subway Arson Attack

A man with a history of depression and angry threats lit a flammable liquid inside a subway car in the city of Taegu, police reported, creating an inferno that engulfed two trains and killed at least 120 people. As the recovery of bodies continued, officials predicted the death toll would rise to about 140. People seeking loved ones crowded around hospitals and the burned-out station in Taegu, a textile center and the ROK's third-largest city, located about 200 miles southeast of Seoul. Only 45 victims have so far been identified, with 388 people still unaccounted for. While officials say the number of missing has been inflated by clerical glitches, the death toll is almost certain to rise from the current figure of 125. Forensic scientists say they will need DNA testing to identify many of the bodies, which were burned beyond recognition.

"ROK Public Response to Subway Attack" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 20, US)

"ROK Subway Arson Attack" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

"ROK Subway Arson Attack" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

8. ROK-DPRK Railway Relations

The ROK and the DPRK on February 14 opened their heavily fortified border for the first time in five decades to allow hundreds of civilians to travel overland to the DPRK. The report said that DPRK decided to allow ROK citizens to use a recently opened temporary road along its east coast for the sixth reunion of separated families and relatives to be held in Mount Kumgang. A group of 498 ROK people embarked on an overland trial tour to Mount Kumgang in the DPRK aboard 20 or so buses through a temporary road on February 14.

"ROK-DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, PRC)

9. DPRK Asylum Seekers

There is a new twist on DPRK asylum seeking in the PRC, four people who fled the DPRK entered a Japanese school in Beijing on Tuesday to apparently ask Japan for political protection, the Japanese government said. The PRC has barricaded foreign embassies and consulates with barbed wire after a rash of DPRK asylum seekers ran through lightly guarded embassy entrances last year. Tuesday's asylum seekers sidestepped the tightly guarded diplomatic quarters and focused on the Japanese School, which is run by Japan's Education Ministry for Japanese nationals in Beijing. Japanese Embassy officials then picked the people up in an embassy car and drove them back to the Japanese Embassy for interviewing, said Foreign Ministry Assistant Press Secretary Jiro Okuyama. It was still unclear whether they were Japanese nationals who had moved to the DPRK, former Korean residents of Japan or DPRK citizens, Okuyama said. It was also uncertain whether they were seeking refugee status or asylum, he added.

"DPRK Asylum Seekers" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

10. DPRK ROK Air Space Intrusion

A DPRK fighter jet briefly crossed the western sea border with the ROK on Thursday but retreated without incident when two ROK jets raced to the area, the ROK Defense Ministry said. The provocation, which also prompted the ROK to put an anti-aircraft missile unit on battle alert. The incursion, the first by a DPRK military jet since 1983. The ROK Defense Ministry said the air incursion ended in just two minutes when the intruding MiG-19 was chased back across the maritime border by the ROK's F-5E fighters.

"DPRK ROK Air Space Intrusion" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 20, US)

11. Kim Jong Il Birthday Celebration

The DPRK turned out by the millions today to praise Kim Jong Il's birthday. Fireworks, nationwide displays of loyalty and huge musical and art performances marked the birthday today of Kim Jong Il who turned 61. The Rodung newspaper picked up the theme today, saying the US was pushing the country "to the brink of war" and urging DPRK citizens to "burn with hatred and hostility in their heart" toward the US. Descriptions of Kim's past birthday celebrations by DPRK refugees who have left the country provide a glimpse of that zealous mix. "For the children, it's more joyful than Christmas," said Lee, a farmer who fled to the PRC with her grown son when life became unbearable. "Every child up to junior high school gets a boxed present. You'd have cookies and candies, good enough for the whole year. The children are told it is the present from our Dear Leader because he loves all children. This is the most awaited day of the year, not just for the children, but for the adults as well." "Kim Jong Il Birthday Celebration" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

People's Republic of China

1. PRC's Attitude towards DPRK Nuclear Issue

PRC foreign ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue told a press conference on February 11 that PRC hopes to see the bilateral talks between US and DPRK be held as soon as possible, and to make efforts to promote the peaceful resolution to the issue. The key to the nuke issue lies in guaranteeing the denuclearization of the peninsula, which was all along supported by PRC Government, she added. The only correct and effective approach to the solution of the DPRK nuclear issue is through a peaceful and political way, said Zhang in the report.

"PRC-ROK Relations on DPRK Nuke Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, PRC)

"PRC's Attitude towards DPRK Nuclear Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, PRC)

2. PRC-DPRK Nuclear Diplomacy

PRC Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi has met with the DPRK's Foreign Minister Paek Namsun to discuss the nuclear standoff unfolding on the Korean Peninsula. While the PRC declined to say whether they talked about the DPRK's threat to drop out of the 1953 Armistice which ended the Korean War, a PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson said the meeting looked at resolving the current crisis through diplomacy and dialogue. "Both sides had a deep and broad discussion on the nuclear issue in North Korea, and exchanged views on the issue. Each side also said they want to see the issue resolved through peaceful means and through dialogue," said PRC Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue.

"PRC on DPRK Diplomacy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 20, US) "PRC-DPRK Nuclear Diplomacy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

3. PRC on US-Iraq Situation

The PRC said on Tuesday not all options have been exhausted to prevent a US attack on Iraq and called on the international community to push for a peaceful solution. "We've not yet reached the stage 'where the hills and streams end'," PRC Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zhang Qiyue told a news conference, quoting a PRC proverb. The PRC has called for weapons inspectors in Iraq to be given more time and welcomed an appeal by France, Germany and Russia for greater efforts to disarm Iraq peacefully. Zhang dismissed talk of a PRC alliance with Russia and France, saying peace was the common aspiration of the international community.

"PRC on US-Iraq Situation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

4. US on PRC Anti-Terror Role

A US envoy praised the PRC on Wednesday for its role in fighting terrorism. Ambassador J. Cofer Black, in Beijing to discuss joint anti-terror efforts, said the two sides talked about law enforcement, diplomatic action and cutting off terrorist financing. Asked how he reconciled such amicable cooperation with US frustration at PRC reluctance to pressure North Korea to settle the standoff over its nuclear program, Black said his mission was anti-terrorism and that the talks hadn't included any other diplomatic issues. "We are very pleased with our cooperation. We think it has great potential," he said. The talks were the third in a series of high-level US-PRC anti-terrorism contacts that began after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in New York and Washington.

"US on PRC Anti-Terror Role" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

5. PRC DPRK Asylum Seekers

On Tuesday, Chu Mi Yong, 43; her daughter, Roh Yu Mi, 13; son, Roh Gwang Myoung, 10; and Kim Chol, 20, entered the school in a bid to seek asylum in Japan, according to Rescue The North Korean People (RENK), a group supporting North Korean asylum seekers. Japan will consult with PRC authorities in an effort to allow four asylum seekers from the DPRK who entered a Japanese school in Beijing to be moved to a third country, government sources said Wednesday. The government also launched consultations with the ROK, which may accept the four, who entered the school grounds Tuesday afternoon when the gates were open to let students leave. It may still take a while until the actual deportation takes place, a Foreign Ministry official said, citing prior cases that took weeks or even months to resolve.

"PRC DPRK Asylum Seekers" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

6. PRC-Japan-US Trade

The PRC overtook the US as the world's leading exporter to Japan last year, reflecting the rising importance of Sino-Japanese trade, a government-backed trade group said Tuesday. Imports to Japan from the PRC in 2002 totaled \$61.7 billion, up 6.1 percent from the previous year, making the PRC the world's top exporter to Japan for the first time, the Japan External Trade Organization, or Jetro, said. All told, the PRC now accounts for 18.3 percent of Japan's total imports. The US accounted for 17 percent of Japan's imports at \$57.5 billion, down 9.5 percent from the previous year for the second straight year of decline, it said.

"PRC-Japan-US Trade" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

7. PRC Anti-Corruption

A senior PRC Communist Party official has warned of the "extreme danger" posed to the Party by corruption. Wu Guanzheng, chairman of the party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, urged committee members to seek new ways to fight the problem. "All commission members must realise the difficulty, and raise their vigilance and awareness of the extreme danger of corruption," Wu said on Tuesday, according to the official newspaper People's Daily. In late January, a meeting of the party's key Politburo reportedly decided that officials at all levels should submit to public supervision.

"PRC Anti-Corruption|" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

8. PRC-WTO Status

The PRC has made "good progress" in complying with World Trade Organization standards in the year since joining the trade group - but it could still do more, US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick said Wednesday. Following a three-day trip to the mainland, Zoellick told reporters in Hong Kong that he was pleased to see that the PRC had lowered tariffs and issued licenses to foreign financial institutions, including insurance companies. He praised the PRC for revising its laws significantly and making them more transparent. But the top US trade official said he was disappointed that PRC authorities ordered more testing on genetically-modified US soybeans before certifying them safe for import on a permanent basis, instead of an interim one.

"PRC-WTO Status" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

Japan

1. Japan Nuclear History

Japan considered developing its own nuclear arsenal in 1995 to counter the threat of a nuclear-armed DPRK, but rejected the idea because it might deprive Japan of US military protection and alarm Asian countries. In a 31-page study, the Defense Agency concluded that the political and financial costs of having nuclear weapons were too high and consequences for the Asian region too weighty, agency spokesman Manabu Shimamoto said Thursday. It was the second time since the end of World War II that Japan had looked into the possibility of starting its own research on nuclear weapons. Japan rejected a similar plan in a 1967-1970 study, he said. As the only country ever attacked with nuclear weapons, Japan has vowed never to possess its own nuclear bombs. But the report showed that government officials haven't entirely ruled out the possibility.

"Japan Nuclear History" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 20, US)

2. US Japan Terrorist Warning

A US counterterrorism official on Thursday warned that Japan should not think it was free from the risk of a terrorist attack on its own shores, a Japanese Foreign Ministry official said. Visiting US State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Cofer Black did not provide details of any specific terrorist threat during his meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi, said Hideaki Mizukoshi. But both officials acknowledged the possibility that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, if they exist, could be handed over to terrorists and described it as an "extremely grave" long-term concern, Mizukoshi said.

"US Japan Terrorist Warning" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 20, US)

3. US-Japan Missile Defense System

Japan and the US will test a missile-defense system that aims to repel a potential attack by the DPRK, the Defense Agency said Monday. The system would launch ship-based missiles against enemy warheads fired at Japan, intending to knock them out of the sky, agency spokesman Ichiro Imaizumi said. "Missile testing will be carried out in due course," Imaizumi said. A report in Monday's Nihon Keizai Shimbun newspaper said the nations will begin testing the missile-defense system in Hawaii next year. Japan has no missile-testing range. The push to develop a new system began in 1999, a year after the DPRK test-fired a missile over Japan into the Pacific Ocean. The total cost of the project was not immediately known, but the newspaper said Japan would shoulder about \$165 million of the development costs. Imaizumi said the issues of cost-sharing and testing dates have not been decided.

"US-Japan Missile Defense System" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 18, US)

4. Japan on US Iraq Policy

Japan appeared to support the US policy on Iraq on Tuesday, telling the U.N. Security Council it is "desirable" to adopt a new resolution showing Iraq has not fully complied in dismantling its weapons of mass destruction. But Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said Wednesday in Tokyo that Japan expressed its support for a new resolution in order to promote a unified international stance on Iraq, not to give its support to a US -led attack. "There is a misunderstanding," Koizumi told reporters in an attempt to dismiss the view that Japan's call for a new resolution immediately means it will support possible military action against Iraq.

"Japan on US Iraq Policy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, US)

"Japan on War against Iraq" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, Japan)

5. US Bases in Japan

Japanese governors of prefectures hosting US military bases urged the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on Wednesday to revise the Japan-US Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Forming a liaison group of 14 governors, they made the call during a meeting at LDP headquarters with an intra-party group aiming to secure a true Japan-US partnership through a revised agreement. Okinawa Gov. Keiichi Inamine told the meeting he cannot accept that under the current agreement, the US military is not required to hand over suspects to Japanese authorities before being indicted for a crime.

A US Marine on trial in Japan for attempted rape will sue the US federal government for handing him over to Japan and thereby subjecting him to the Japanese criminal justice system, a US lawyer representing him said Thursday. Maj. Michael Brown, 39, has decided to file a suit at a US federal district court in Texas, New York-based attorney Michael Griffith told reporters in Okinawa. Japanese public prosecutors indicted Brown on Dec. 19 on a charge of attempting to rape a Filipino woman in his car in Okinawa on Nov. 2. Brown, who was stationed at Camp Courtney in Okinawa, says he did not try to rape the woman. Brown is also considering naming the Japanese government in the suit, according to Griffith.

"US Bases in Japan" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, Japan)

6. SDF-Police Joint Drill

The Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) and Osaka Prefectural Police conducted a joint security drill Wednesday simulating an attack by armed commandos. The drill, a strategy scenario involving 80 senior police and GSDF officers, was aimed at enhancing countermeasures for dealing with large-scale terrorist activities in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 and occasional DPRK spy ship intrusions, officials said. The scenario included agents armed with rocket launchers landing in Osaka Prefecture. During the simulation, the two groups tracked and neutralized the intruders, patrolled key installations and evacuated civilians. It is the third time the SDF and police conducted such a joint exercise.

"SDF-Police Joint Drill" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, Japan)

7. Japanese Logistic Support for US

The Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) ships providing fuel to the US and British ships in the Indian Ocean will expand its refueling operations in the Arabian Sea in early March to include naval vessels from eight more countries, Japanese sources said Wednesday. The countries -- Canada, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Spain -- are among members of the US-led coalition engaged in the antiterrorism campaign, the sources said. Under the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law enacted in October 2001, the MSDF is currently refueling US and British warships engaged in operations in the Arabian Sea to hunt down al-Qaeda and Taliban members fleeing Afghanistan.

"Japanese Logistic Support for US" (NAPSNet Daily Report, February 19, Japan)

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