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United States

1. Saddam Response to US Ultimatum

A defiant Iraq rejected a US ultimatum giving President Saddam Hussein 48 hours to go into exile or face war, but the US warned bluntly it would invade no matter what. Military preparations gathered pace with nearly 300,000 US and British troops poised in the Gulf while UN arms inspectors and diplomats fled ahead of an imminent military showdown that has fractured the international community. "This battle will be Iraq's last battle against the tyrannous villains and the last battle of aggression undertaken by America against the Arabs," Saddam declared, rejecting the US deadline as "despicable." US President George W. Bush issued the 48-hour ultimatum after the collapse in acrimony of diplomatic efforts at the UN Security Council to rid Baghdad of its alleged arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. "Saddam Response to US Ultimatum" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

2. US Arms Inspectors

The US has advised the United Nations to pull its weapons inspectors out of Iraq, the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog said on Monday in the clearest signal to date that war is imminent. The advice, late on Sunday, followed an ultimatum from President Bush that the world body had just one more day to give its blessing to a resolution sanctioning the use of force to rid Iraq of suspected weapons of mass destruction. But with the divided Security Council due to begin consultations at 10 a.m. (1500 GMT) on Monday in New York, France restated a veto threat that is likely to signal the end of diplomacy and a green light for a U.S.-led war.

(NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

3. US Panel on US-DPRK Talks

A group of prominent US experts on Korea has challenged the Bush administration's rejection of direct negotiations with the DPRK, saying the US should begin talks to test the communist government's willingness to give up its nuclear program. The group includes four former ambassadors, three former top-ranking military officers, missile experts, academics and specialists who have offered a strategy to break the deadlock between Washington and the DPRK government in Pyongyang. The administration has said it will not negotiate until the DPRK agrees to dismantle its programs to develop nuclear weapons, and then will talk only in a multinational group. The DPRK insists on direct negotiations with the US. "There was division on the task force about whether it was too late to try to negotiate with North Korea," said the chairman of the group, Selig S. Harrison, director of the Asia Program at the Center for International Policy, a Washington research organization. But to discover what is possible, he said, "there was complete agreement that the first steps have to be in direct, bilateral negotiations between the DPRK and the US."

"US Panel on US-DPRK Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

4. International Anti-war Movement

Tens of thousands of people took part in weekend protests against a possible US-led war against Iraq. Displaying an antiwar banner, a giant concrete mixer leads a convoy of 200 vehicles from an industrial waste disposal site in Osaka, for a downtown demonstration. Some 1,200 concrete industry union members took part in the protest. About 10,000 people rallied in Tokyo on Saturday, according to organizers, later marching through the Ginza shopping district waving banners emblazoned with the phrase "Peace to the World." Demonstrations organized by numerous citizens' groups were also staged in Osaka and Nagoya as part of an international protest against war. In Okinawa, which hosts the bulk of US forces in Japan, organizers said 5,500 people thronged a park in Naha to oppose an US-led war on Iraq. In Tokyo, some 200 people attended a meeting at Sophia University to hear journalists warn against the imposition of new controls on the media.

"International Anti-war Movement" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, Japan)

Republic of Korea

1. DPRK Nuclear Issue

The DPRK has shown no signs of reactivating a nuclear reprocessing facility capable of producing nuclear weapons, a senior Foreign Affairs-Trade Ministry official said Sunday. Nor has DPRK shown any moves to test-fire ballistic missiles that will escalate tensions on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia, the official said, asking not be identified. "The United States, on its part, has not conveyed any information regarding possible provocative acts to us," the official said. Another official from the ministry renewed the government's stance that DPRK needs to accept the idea of multinational negotiation first as an initial step to entering into direct dialogue with the US. DPRK Sunday continued to censure the US, raising the issue of annual ROK-US military exercises now underway, calling them steps to prepare for a war against DPRK.

"DPRK Nuclear Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, ROK)

2. DPRK Missile Developments

The DPRK on March 10 test-fired a missile into the sea off its coast around midday, the ROK announced. ROK Defense Ministry spokesman Kim Ki-Beom said the missile was believed to be an anti-ship missile similar to one that the DPRK test-fired on February 24. ROK was trying to determine whether the new test was successful, reports in Seoul said. The launch was also confirmed by the Japanese Government, and Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hatsuhsa Takashima said that: "We understand this was not a ballistic missile and therefore is not considered a direct threat to Japan." The DPRK on March 10 sought to justify its interception of an American spy plane by four fighter jets in international air-space as a defensive act. "We cannot stand by and watch the aggressive attempts by the US army," said a commentary in the government Rodong Sinmun newspaper in Pyongyang.

"DPRK on Missile Development Right" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

"Another Test Missile Fired by DPRK" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, PRC)

"DPRK Nuclear Arms Race?" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

3. DPRK-US Relations

The DPRK warned Monday that its sovereignty is at stake in the standoff over its nuclear development, while the US ambassador in the ROK said that the DPRK has an "irrational fear" of the US. The DPRK's official Rodong Sinmun newspaper said the US' rejection of direct talks was "little short of refusing to solve the nuclear issue." "The nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula is a very crucial problem related to who beats whom," the DPRK newspaper said. "It will decide whether the DPRK's sovereignty will be trampled down by the US or protected."

The US is resuming reconnaissance flights in areas near the DPRK despite the alleged intercept of a US reconnaissance plane by DPRK fighter jets earlier this month, US officials said March 12, 2003. The officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity, did not clarify whether such flights had actually resumed but only said that the US military has plans to send RC-135 reconnaissance planes back to their spy missions in international air space off the DPRK. Instead of being escorted by fighter jets, the reconnaissance planes will be watched over by US Navy warships and AWACS military radar planes, the officials said in the report.

"US-DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, PRC)

"DPRK-US Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, US)

4. Perspective of US Ambassador in ROK

US Ambassador Thomas Hubbard reconfirmed Monday that US will employ diplomatic and peaceful means to resolve the nuclear standoff with DPRK, saying the issue is different from the situation in Iraq. During a breakfast seminar organized by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Hubbard said international efforts to seek a multilateral approach to the nuclear issue have just begun, whereas the world has tried to get Iraq to disarm for more than 10 years. "We have time to deal with the nuclear issue. There is a high possibility that the issue will be resolved peacefully," the top US diplomat in Seoul said. Hubbard noted that US President George W. Bush "has repeatedly stated his aim is to solve the North Korean nuclear issue peacefully through multilateral diplomacy."

"Perspective of US Ambassador in ROK" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, ROK)

5. ROK on US-Led War on Iraq

The ROK backed a potential US-led war in Iraq on Wednesday and said it may dispatch non-combat troops to help. The ROK also said it will step up security at US military bases and other interests in the event of war. Police patrols will be boosted at nearly 700 foreign facilities across the ROK, including embassies and diplomats' residences, that could be targeted for attack by terrorists or violent protesters, the National Police Agency said. The ROK's support for its top ally the US puts it in a small coalition of nations willing to aid the US in the bid to oust Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

"ROK on US-Led War on Iraq" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

"ROK Preparation for Iraq War" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, ROK)

6. ROK-US Military Exercises

The US-led United Nations Command told DPRK officers Wednesday that military exercises in the ROK are defensive and not related to "current world events," an apparent reference to US preparations for war against. But the DPRK said that the US was preparing to launch a nuclear attack. The U.N. Command made its statement in discussions between colonels holding a weekly meeting at Panmunjom truce village in the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas. North Korea refused a request to discuss the matter at a higher military level on Thursday, the Command said. "The KPA (Korean People's Army) has turned down an excellent opportunity to discuss important events affecting the Korean peninsula," Col. Martin Glasser of the Command's Military Armistice Commission said in a statement. Glasser said the annual joint military exercises in the South are not related to "current world events."

"ROK-US Military Exercises" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

"US-ROK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, PRC)

7. US ROK Base Relocation

The US expects to offer a plan within months to relocate a military base from Seoul as part of a realignment of US forces in the ROK that could include the possible removal of US troops from the country, the Pentagon said on Wednesday. At issue is Yongsan Garrison, the headquarters for the US military force that has been in the ROK since the Korean War 50 years ago. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, stated that the US wanted to have at least a preliminary blueprint for a revised military relationship with the ROK by October. This would include "rebalancing some of our roles and responsibilities, relocating Yongsan and having some preliminary ideas for repositioning some US forces south of the Han river" at the south end of downtown Seoul.

"US ROK Base Relocation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

8. DPRK-ROK Relations

The ROK and the DPRK on March 12 said they had agreed to resume work on a cross-border railway this month aimed at restoring inter-Korean rail links for the first time in five decades. The accord, reached after three days of negotiations which ended in the DPRK on March 11, says the work "will start late in March from the military demarcation line inside the demilitarized zone (DMZ)" which divides the north and the south, the ROK's unification ministry said in a statement.

"DPRK-ROK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, PRC)

9. ROK's Credit Rating by Moody's

A senior Finance Ministry official said Sunday that the credit rating agency Moody's Investors Service might downgrade ROK's assessment unless there is progress in the effort to resolve DPRK's nuclear problem soon. The possibility was communicated to senior South Korean finance officials who accompanied the Blue House adviser for foreign affairs, Ban Ki-moon, to US last week, the official said. The finance ministry official said ROK's delegation assured Moody's officials of visible progress on the issue in the next two months. Moody's downgraded the outlook for Korea's sovereign rating by two notches to "negative" last month, but it did not change Korea's A3 rating last Thursday when it announced new international assessments. Moody's will send another delegation to ROK in mid-April for an on-the-spot inspection.

"ROK's Credit Rating by Moody's" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, ROK)

"Pessimistically Evaluated ROK Economy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, ROK)

People's Republic of China

1. PRC on DPRK-US Diplomacy

PRC President Hu Jintao urged United States President George W. Bush during a telephone conversation to enter into a dialogue with the DPRK as soon as possible. Hu told Bush that the key to resolving the nuclear stand-off on the Korean peninsula lay in launching more talks, particularly between the US and the DPRK, Xinhua television said Tuesday. Actions that will escalate the situation should not be taken, he said. The PRC leader said there was a need to launch dialogues "in certain forms as soon as possible, especially between the US and the DPRK", it said. Hu told his US counterpart that the PRC has always stood for keeping the Korean peninsula nuclear-free, maintaining its peace and stability, and solving problems through dialogue.

"PRC on US-DPRK Diplomacy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

"PRC on DPRK-US Diplomacy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

"PRC's Stance on DPRK Issue" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, PRC)

2. PRC on US-Iraq War

The PRC said it was "deeply worried" about developments in the Iraq crisis and all Security Council members should work together to avoid war as long there was "a glimmer of hope". "The Chinese side is deeply worried about the developments of the Iraq situation," said foreign ministry spokesman Kong Quan after the US gave Saddam Hussein and his sons 48 hours to leave Iraq or face war. "War seems to be imminent and all members of the Security Council should work together to avoid it," said Kong. He said the PRC had taken note of the address by US President George W. Bush earlier Tuesday in which he gave Saddam the ultimatum, but said the PRC remained unconvinced conflict was the right course of action.

"We have taken note of the TV speech by President Bush but China's position still stands," he said. "A political solution to the Iraq question within the UN framework should be sought."

"PRC on US-Iraq War" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

3. PRC Iraq Embassy Evacuation

The Associated Press ("CHINA ANNOUNCES EVACUATION OF EMBASSY IN IRAQ," Beijing, 03/17/03) reported that the PRC was evacuating its embassy staff in Iraq on Monday due to the "looming war," the official Xinhua News Agency reported. The order for Ambassador Zhang Weiqiu and six other officials to leave followed evacuation orders by a number of countries amid the "tense atmosphere of a looming war," Xinhua said. It said six PRC reporters also were leaving - two from Xinhua, three from PRC state television and one from an unidentified Hong Kong news outlet.

"PRC Iraq Embassy Evacuation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, US)

4. PRC Domestic Politics

The third-ranking member of the PRC's Communist Party was appointed Sunday to be its next premier, assuming control of a fast-changing economy that has carried the country to new heights and created staggering problems during two decades of reform. Wen Jiabao, 60, replaces the retiring Zhu Rongji. The vote was 2,906 for Wen and three against, with 16 abstentions. Wen rose and shook hands with Zhu as the Great Hall of the People applauded. The legislature, the National People's Congress, approved Wen's elevation as the final personnel appointment of a generational leadership transition in China's government. Wen, the odds-on favorite for more than a year, becomes the country's top economic official. He made no public remarks after his appointment but shook hands with delegates after the session adjourned.

5. PRC's New Cabinet

The following is the list of ministerial members of China's State Council, approved on March 17 at the 7th plenary meeting of the First Session of the 10th National People's Congress: 1. Li Zhaoxing: Minister of Foreign Affairs; 2. Cao Gangchuan: Minister of National Defense (concurrently); 3. Ma Kai: Minister in charge of the State Development and Reform Commission; 4. Zhou Ji: Ministry of Education; 5. Xu Guanhua: Minister of Science and Technology; 6. Zhang Yunchuan: Minister in charge of the Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense; 7. Li Dek Su (Korean): Minister in charge of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission; 8. Zhou Yongkang: Minister of Public Security (concurrently); 9. Xu Yongyue: Minister of State Security; 10. Li Zhilun: Minister of Supervision; 11. Li Xueju: Minister of Civil Affairs; 12. Zhang Fusen: Minister of Justice; 13. Jin Renqing: Minister of Finance; 14. Zhang Bolin: Minister of Personnel; 15. Zheng Silin: Minister of Labor and Social Security; 16. Tian Fengshan: Minister of Land and Resources; 17. Wang Guangtao: Minister of Construction; 18. Liu Zhijun: Minister of Railways; 19. Zhang Chunxian: Minister of Communications; 20. Wang Xudong: Minister of Information Industry; 21. Wang Shucheng: Minister of Water Resources; 22. Du Qinglin: Minister of Agriculture; 23. Lu Fuyuan: Minister of Commerce; 24. Sun Jiazheng: Minister of Culture; 25. Zhang Wenkang: Minister of Health; 26. Zhang Weiqing: Minister in charge of the State Commission for Population and Family Planning; 27. Zhou Xiaochuan: Governor of the People's Bank of China; 28. Li Jinhua: Auditor-General of the National Audit Office.

"PRC's New Cabinet" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

"PRC Domestic Politics" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, US)

6. PRC Premiere Wen on Cross-Straits Relations

The PRC's newly appointed Premier Wen Jiabao waxed poetical on the early reunification of Taiwan, while calling for the resumption of talks between the two sides of the strait. "The Chinese government will unswervingly adhere to the policy of peaceful reunification under the one country, two systems formula and seek an early resumption of dialogue," he said in his first press conference as premier since being endorsed by parliament Sunday. "The achievement of peaceful reunification is a long-standing hope of all the Chinese people including the Taiwan compatriots," he said. "We are against Taiwan independence, we oppose Taiwan independence."

"PRC Premiere Wen on Cross-Straits Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

"Relations Across Taiwan Straits" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, PRC)

7. PRC Social Agenda

New PRC premier, Wen Jiabao, offered his vision today of a kinder, gentler government, focusing on the country's growing problems of unemployment and economic distress. The 60-year-old former geologist referred to himself as a common man, quoted poetry and spoke movingly about his past during an almost two-hour, televised news conference. He listed a series of problems facing the country, citing stagnant income for farmers and bad management in the state-owned sector. Unemployment is increasing, he said, a rising gap exists between the PRC's cities, and the countryside, and state-owned banks hold billions of dollars in bad loans. The PRC's problems are daunting, he said, but "one prospers in worries and hardships and perishes in ease and comfort." The news conference was the first time most citizens had a glimpse of the new premier. The event came at the end of the annual session of the National People's Congress.

"PRC Social Agenda" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

8. PRC-US Relations

PRC President Jiang Zemin discussed over phone the nuclear issue of the DPRK and the Iraq issue with US President George W. Bush on March 10. Bush said the US attaches importance to PRC's stand on the nuclear issue and is ready to achieve denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula through multilateral efforts. On the nuclear issue of the DPRK, Jiang said PRC hopes that various sides should keep calm and avoid actions that may make the situation tenser. PRC approves the US intention of addressing related matters peacefully through dialogue, Jiang said.

"PRC-US Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, PRC)

9. PRC's Stance on Counter-terrorism

The PRC supports the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) contribution to the efforts against potential nuclear terrorism and attaches great importance to the security of radioactive sources, said Xu Yuming, vice-chairman of China Atomic Energy Authority, told the International Conference on Security of Radioactive Sources on March 12. PRC fights against all kinds of terrorism, including nuclear terrorism, and believes that every government has the duty to fight nuclear terrorism, said Xu. The PRC maintains that while the international community, including the IAEA, actively implements the preventive measures against nuclear terrorism, the co-operation in the area of the peaceful use of nuclear energy should be promoted, Xu said.

"PRC's Stance on Counter-terrorism" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, PRC)

10. PRC Pneumonia Outbreak Origin

The World Health Organization issued an emergency global alert yesterday, warning that a mysterious, sometimes fatal pneumonia-like illness posed a worldwide threat after spreading from Asia to Europe and North America. More than 400 people have been sickened by the disease since the respiratory illness surfaced in the PRC, including at least 150 new cases in the last week alone, officials said. The deadly pneumonia-like illness originated in southern PRC in November and peaked a month ago, according to a report the PRC government provided to WHO officials. The outbreak sparked months of panic buying of vinegar, herbal remedies and antibiotics in the PRC. Epidemiologists suspect it is the same illness seen over the past two weeks in Hong Kong, Vietnam, Canada, Germany, Thailand, Taiwan, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia. The illness, which originated in Guangdong province, sickened about 300 people in the PRC, with five dying.

"Super Pneumonia Identification" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

"PRC Pneumonia Outbreak Origin" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, US)

Japan

1. Japan DPRK Threat

In the face of a perceived threat from the DPRK, Japan is considering bolstering its spy ship presence in the sea shared by the two countries. A Japanese defense spokesman said the country may boost the number of missile-detecting destroyers deployed near the DPRK from one to three amid jitters over a possible ballistic missile launch by Pyongyang, Kyodo News Agency said. As concerns mount over the threat the DPRK poses to East Asia, Japan says it is considering upping its missile defense systems. "There is no point in having the Aegis ships, each costing more than 100 billion yen (\$850 million), if they are not brought to the Sea of Japan at a time when Japan's national security is being threatened by North Korea," the agency on Friday quoted a government official as saying.

"Japan DPRK Threat" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, US)

2. Japan-DPRK Relations

Japan has warned the DPRK that it may scrap a landmark agreement between the two sides if the DPRK carries out a ballistic missile test aimed at Japan. The agreement, known as the Pyongyang Declaration, commits the DPRK to an extension of its 1999 moratorium on long-range missile tests in exchange for Japanese aid. It was signed at an historic summit between the DPRK and Japanese leaders last year.

Japan has told the US it will strengthen monitoring of DPRK as part of its measures to cooperate with the US in the event of a war in Iraq, Japanese and US sources said Tuesday. Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Ryozo Kato conveyed an outline of support measures planned by Japan to US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz at a meeting Monday at the Pentagon, the sources said. Japan and the US are apparently concerned that DPRK may take provocative actions, such as the test-launching of ballistic missiles, while the US military focuses on Iraq. At the Pentagon, Kato expressed full support for the U.S. taking military action against Iraq, and Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz appreciated it, the sources said.

"Japan-DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, Japan)

"Japan-DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

3. Japan on US-Led Iraq War

In the face of strong and growing opposition, the Japanese prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, expressed strong support today for the US' ultimatum to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq to leave his country within 48 hours or face war. "Now that it is determined that the extremely dangerous regime of Hussein has no intention to disarm, I believe it appropriate to support America's use of force," Koizumi said at a news conference today. Koizumi's foreign minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi, reinforced the Japanese government's message in a meeting with Iraq's interim chargé d'affaires, Qasim Shakir. "If Iraq paves the way for the abolition of its weapons of mass destruction with the exile of President Hussein, the Iraqi people will be able to avoid damage stemming from military action," Kawaguchi was quoted as telling the envoy.

Hatsuhisa Takashima, a foreign ministry spokesman, said: "Prime Minister Koizumi made it clear that because of the constitutional constraints, Japan will not participate in any military action against Iraq. However, the government of Japan will make a thorough study on how to help the rehabilitation and reconstruction of postwar Iraq and contribute to international peace and stability while making utmost efforts to secure the safety of Japanese nationals and to prevent any economic disruption."

Japan has decided to dispatch Self-Defense Force troops to countries neighboring Iraq to aid refugees in the event of a US-led attack. Japan will mobilize its forces as soon as it receives a request from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the consent of the neighboring countries, the Nihon Keizai newspaper said. The report came as US President George W. Bush on Tuesday warned Saddam Hussein and his sons to leave Iraq within 48 hours or face a US-led war to topple his "dying regime" and strip Baghdad of weapons of mass destruction. Defense Agency spokesman Manabu Shimamoto declined to confirm the report, but explained that in general, by law, Japanese troops can only be dispatched after fighting in the area has stopped.

"Japan on US-Led Iraq War" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

"Japan-US Relations over Iraqi Crisis" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, Japan)

"Japan Role in US-Iraq War" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

"Japan on War against Iraq" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, Japan)

4. Japan on UN Iraq Resolution

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi indicated Monday that he believes the US already has enough of a U.N. Security Council mandate to go to war in Iraq. He suggested that an attack could be waged on the basis of previous UNSC resolutions, including resolution 1441, which states that Iraq "will face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations." Koizumi indicated that no fresh resolution is necessary after the US, Britain and Spain set a Monday deadline for a diplomatic solution to the Iraq standoff.

"Japan on US-Iraq War" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 18, US)

"Japan on UN Iraq Resolution" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, US)

5. Japan Iraq Human Shields

Four Japanese people intend to remain in Iraq to act as "human shields" even after a military strike is launched, Foreign Ministry officials said Monday. The four are among 69 Japanese who were still in Iraq as of Monday despite the looming war, the officials said. They are mostly with the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations and news organizations, the officials added. The ministry is trying to persuade the four peace activists to leave Iraq immediately, telephoning relatives to urge them to get out, the officials said.

"Japan Iraq Human Shields" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, US)

6. Japan Role in Iraq Reconstruction

The Japan government will submit a package of bills to help in the postwar reconstruction of Iraq to the Diet probably by early May, Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Taku Yamasaki said Wednesday. Japan's role in the aftermath of the much-anticipated war is expected to include providing Self-Defense Forces as part of multinational peacekeeping units in the event the United Nations dispatches such forces to Iraq, Yamasaki told reporters. "It is generally believed that the war will end within one month," the LDP's No. 2 man said, explaining the probable timetable for the legislation.

"Japan Role in Iraq Reconstruction" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

7. Japan Domestic Economy

The US is fairly optimistic about the global economic impact of a possible war with Iraq, but it is concerned about Japan's sluggish economy, an US administration official said. "The broader question is obviously the Japanese economy does remain weak and the future uncertain, and we remain concerned about that," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The US administration will continue to support Japan's efforts to fight deflation, clean up bad loans in the banking sector and promote corporate restructuring, according to the official.

Just days ahead of a war, the US and Japan are prepared to co-operate to support the financial markets if there is a crisis. A deal was struck last week in the US between a former Japanese finance minister and the head of the US central bank, the Federal Reserve's Alan Greenspan. "There was an agreement between Japan and the US to take action co-operatively in foreign exchange, stocks and other markets if the markets face a crisis," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda said. The move came as Japan's key Nikkei 225 index dropped to another 20-year low, falling about 1.5% to hit 7,824.82, before rebounding. Finance and economics minister Heizo Takenaka said the Bank of Japan and stock exchanges would be watching the markets closely during the current Iraq crisis.

"US on Japan's Economy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, JAPAN)

"US-Japan Economic Cooperation" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 19, US)

"Japan Domestic Economy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 17, US)

[\(return to top\)](#)

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