

NAPSNET Week in Review 5 March, 2004

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United States

1. US Post-Multilateral Talks Assessment

US President Bush's chief negotiator with the DPRK told a Senate panel on Tuesday that it was "quite possible" that the country had turned all 8,000 of its spent nuclear fuel rods into plutonium to fuel nuclear weapons. The assessment, by James A. Kelly, the assistant secretary of state for Asia, left open the possibility that while the Bush administration has been conducting painstakingly slow negotiations with the DPRK, the government there made good on its threats to produce several new atomic bombs. But after his testimony, Kelly said that formal intelligence assessments of the DPRK's arsenal had not changed, and that "the operative phrase I used is, 'We don't know for sure.'"

"US Post-Multilateral Talks Assessment" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

2. DPRK-US Relations

The US is not losing patience with diplomatic efforts to end the DPRK's suspected nuclear arms program, Secretary of State Colin Powell said on Thursday. The comments appeared designed to avoid precipitating a new confrontation with the DPRK ahead of the Nov. 2 US election and to reassure allies that the US is committed to a diplomatic path after a report suggested US patience was wearing thin.

"DPRK-US Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

3. US on DPRK-PRC Diplomatic Relations

Relying so much on the PRC to facilitate six-party talks on the DPRK's nuclear crisis may cause some problems, according to two senior US Senate aides who recently visited the DPRK. In a report, Keith Luse and Frank Jannuzi concluded that while the PRC shares the US goal of a non-nuclear Korean peninsula, the PRC "will always place its own interests first in this process" and its interests are "not identical" to the US'. In addition, they found after visiting the DPRK and other key East Asian states in January, that the North Koreans "are not certain that China has accurately transmitted messages between Washington and Pyongyang."

"US on DPRK-PRC Diplomatic Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

4. US on DPRK Drug Trafficking

The US said that the DPRK was almost certainly running state-sanctioned drugs trafficking operations for profit. The seizure last year of a DPRK ship off Australia implicated in drugs trafficking and a string of other incidents "reflect official involvement in the trafficking of illicit narcotics for profit," the department said. Such evidence makes it "highly likely, but not certain, that the DPRK is trading narcotic drugs for profit as state policy," the department said in its annual International Narcotics Control Strategy report.

"US on DPRK Drug Trafficking" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

5. US Elections and DPRK Relations

The DPRK is staunchly in the "anybody but George W. Bush" camp in the US election, but ROK critics of the president say Pyongyang would be unwise to stall nuclear talks and hope for "regime change" in Washington. The DPRK's stance at nuclear talks with the US in Beijing last week has prompted speculation the DPRK will wait out the November 2 vote for a better deal if Bush loses.

"US Elections and DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

Korean Peninsula

1. Post-Six-Way DPRK Nuclear Talks

The DPRK agreed in the latest nuclear weapons talks to consider a US demand that it dismantle its programs based both on plutonium and uranium, the chief US negotiator told lawmakers Tuesday. "The North Koreans came to the table denying a uranium enrichment program," Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. But, in a reversal, he said, "It was clear by the conclusion of the talks that this is now very much on the table." "Post-Six-Way DPRK Nuclear Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

"DPRK-US Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

2. DPRK Uranium Program

Despite reported progress in recent DPRK nuclear talks, ROK officials said Thursday that the DPRK still denies having a secret uranium-based program and that other crucial issues - including an agenda for working-group meetings - are up in the air. The agreement for lower-level officials to meet in working groups to nail down details of a possible deal was seen as a step forward at the six-nation talks that ended Saturday in Beijing. Diplomats say they are crucial in striking common ground before the next round of six-way talks, expected before July.

"DPRK Uranium Program" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

3. DPRK Nuclear Working Groups

The ROK's chief negotiator to six-nation talks aimed at ending the DPRK's nuclear drive said he hoped a first working group meeting on the issue would be held in two weeks. The US, PRC, Russia, Japan and both the ROK and DPRK agreed after the Beijing talks, their second on the nuclear issue, to launch working level meetings to discuss various technical issues. They also agreed to a third round of talks by June. The dates and venues of the working level meetings were not finalized.

"DPRK Nuclear Working Groups" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

4. DPRK on US Proliferation Security Initiative

US President Bush made a "proposal for non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)" in a recent speech at National Defence University in Washington. Nodong Sinmun today in a signed commentary dismisses this as a sheer fallacy intended to reinforce the US-led "security initiative to prevent proliferation" in a bid to paralyse the function of the present international legal system and realize its ambition for world supremacy.

"DPRK on US Proliferation Security Initiative" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

5. ROK Domestic Politics

The ROK's second largest opposition party said it planned to launch impeachment proceedings against President Roh Moo-Hyun unless he apologized for breaching election laws. The Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) said President Roh could face impeachment next week if he did not issue an apology after being rebuked for speaking in support of pro-government candidates in parliamentary polls. Roh has made no comments on the NEC move, but his aides have claimed the president himself "is entitled to express political opinions" under the current election laws.

"ROK Domestic Politics" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004) "ROK Domestic Politics" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

6. Inter-Korean Relations

Working-level officials from the ROK and DPRK formally met on Thursday to clinch a deal over a set of economic projects. On the third day of the South-North Economic Cooperation Promotion Committee, the ROK and DPRK tried to issue a joint statement highlighting additional inter-Korean projects. The two delegates, however, were at odds over a few major issues. Delegates disagreed over the timeframe of reconnecting the cross-border roads and an industrial complex to be built at Kaesong, the DPRK's border town.

"Inter-Korean Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

"Inter-Korean Economic Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

7. Inter-Korean Railway

The ROK and DPRK have agreed towards reconnecting a cross-border road by first half of this year, ROK officials said Wednesday. Economic officials of the ROK and DPRK met in Seoul Wednesday to review the progress of cross-border transportation links and other joint projects being pushed as part the historic inter-Korean summit in 2000. A 27-member DPRK delegation, led by a vice Cabinet ministerial-level official, flew to Seoul Tuesday for the previously arranged talks, the eighth since the historic inter-Korean summit in 2000.

"Inter-Korean Railway" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

8. ROK-US Relations

Visiting ROK Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon paid a courtesy call on US President George Bush at the White House Tuesday morning, an informed diplomatic source said. During the meeting, the two discussed the outcome of the just-ended six-way talks on the DPRK's nuclear weapons programs and other issues of mutual concern, including the ROK's troop dispatch to Iraq, the source said.

"ROK-US Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

9. ROK Security Initiatives

The National Security Council (NSC) on Thursday came up with a package of initiatives aimed at maintaining peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and on the Korean peninsula. The booklet of initiatives features balanced pursuit of "cooperative security ties" with key allies and focuses on national self-defense, which is expected to soften its so-called "independent diplomacy" policy aimed at bringing more equality to the relationship between the US and the ROK.

"ROK Security Initiatives" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

10. Inter-Korean Humanitarian Aid

The ROK's government said it would provide the DPRK with 200,000 tons of fertilizer aid this year in response to a request from the starving communist state. It will also put aside 47 billion won (40 million dollars) from its cooperation fund to help build infrastructure such as roads in an inter-Korean industrial park in the DPRK's Kaesong City.

"Inter-Korean Humanitarian Aid" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

11. DPRK Chemical Torture?

A senior DPRK chemist who defected to the South two years ago says he witnessed the government testing chemical weapons on political prisoners. Although the chemist's information is dated - he says he saw one experiment personally in 1979 and heard about others until the mid-1990s - his statements mark the first time a high-level scientist from the DPRK has spoken out about human experimentation. The chemist said fear of retribution against family members still in the DPRK had kept him from speaking out until now but he decided to break his silence because of the need for the world to know.

"DPRK Chemical Torture?" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

12. Australia-DPRK Relations

Australia has appointed an ambassador to the DPRK in recognition of the rogue state's new-found commitment to talks aimed at ending its nuclear programs. Downer said ambassador to PRC Allan Thomas would travel to Pyongyang to present his credentials. Dr. Thomas will maintain his post in Beijing.

"Australia-DPRK Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

13. DPRK-EU Relations

The European Union is 100 percent supportive of the six-party dialogue process to resolve the DPRK nuclear standoff, according to Paul Murray, Ireland's recently accredited ambassador to the DPRK. Ireland currently holds the EU's revolving presidency. Murray also said that while the EU is not directly involved in the Beijing talks, it would favorably consider contributing to any aid deal offered to the DPRK in exchange for scrapping its nuclear programs.

"DPRK-EU Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

People's Republic of China

1. PRC on DPRK Nuclear Talks

The PRC urged nations engaged in talks to get the DPRK to give up its nuclear weapons program to refrain from words or actions that might worsen the standoff ahead of a next round of negotiations. PRC Vice-Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the PRC's chief delegate to the talks, laid out three areas where the US, the DPRK, Japan, the ROK and Russia "should make concerted efforts."

"PRC on DPRK Nuclear Talks" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

2. PRC Military Development

The PRC will strengthen its military and build up its arsenal of high-tech weaponry, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao said at the opening of the annual session of parliament. Legislators told AFP military spending this year would rise 11.6 percent over 2003, marking a return to double-digit growth in defense expenditures. The figure was expected to be announced Saturday in Finance Minister Jin Renqing's budget report. The PRC increased its stated military budget by 9.6 percent in 2003, following a 17.6 percent rise in defense spending in 2002 and a 17.7 percent increase in 2001.

"PRC Military Development" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

3. Cross-Straits Relations

PRC Premier Wen Jiabao warned Taiwan at the opening of the annual session of parliament that Beijing would firmly oppose any Taiwanese independence drive and never allow a split from the PRC. "We stand firmly opposed to any form of separatist activities aimed at Taiwan independence and will never allow anyone to split Taiwan from China by any means," Wen said in his annual address to parliament.

"Cross-Straits Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

4. PRC-DPRK Glass Factory Financing

The PRC will provide financing for the construction of a glass plant in the DPRK, as the DPRK showed a sincere attitude during last week's multilateral talks on its nuclear activities, according to a source familiar with the matter Tuesday 2 March. Although the second round of six-nation nuclear talks that ended Saturday were not fully satisfactory, the PRC had decided to provide 50 million US dollars to help the DPRK build a glass plant near Pyongyang, as was promised last year.

"PRC-DPRK Glass Factory Financing" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

5. PRC-Hong Kong Relations

Hong Kong pro-democracy leader Martin Lee met US Secretary of State Colin Powell and said that despite problems in the territory he was confident the PRC's leaders understood the value of giving more freedom to Hong Kong. Lee's trip to the US to give testimony to a Senate panel has angered Beijing. The talks with Powell were arranged at the last minute. "The secretary, by giving us this meeting at such short notice, it seems to me certainly shows his great concern for Hong Kong," Lee said.

"PRC-Hong Kong Relations" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

6. PRC Economic Growth

PRC Premier Wen Jiabao said his government hoped to slow the PRC's sizzling economy this year and urged a more equitable distribution of wealth and better controls on haphazard and redundant investment. Speaking before some 5,000 delegates and political advisers to the annual session of the National People's Congress, Wen said the government was targeting economic growth of seven percent and also pledged to keep the PRC yuan "basically stable.

"PRC Economic Growth" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004) "PRC Economic and Constitutional Reform" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 3, 2004)

7. Australia-PRC Free Trade Agreement?

New Zealand has a "strong chance" of becoming the first Western nation to sign a free-trade agreement with the PRC, the communist state's ambassador to New Zealand has told a local newspaper. There is an excellent level of goodwill between the two nations and New Zealand's firm adherence to the One China policy is "very important to us," PRC Ambassador Chen Mingming said in an interview published in the New Zealand Herald newspaper Thursday.

"Australia-PRC Free Trade Agreement?" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

8. PRC Aids Humanitarian Crisis

Just 10 percent of the PRC's HIV-AIDS cases know they have the disease, the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said as it launched a 15 million dollar campaign to help fight the crisis. The initiative is part of the Global AIDS Program, which is currently focusing on 25 countries including the PRC. It targets 10 provinces, including central Henan which has been hit by a major AIDS outbreak from farmers selling blood in unsafe government-run schemes.

"PRC Aids Humanitarian Crisis" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

Japan

1. Japan on DPRK Economic Sanctions

Japan Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi fought off calls Wednesday to impose economic sanctions against the DPRK over lack of progress on the abduction issue. "We must calmly consider whether showing off a glittering sword taken out from its sheath is actually effective," Koizumi said in response to Jin Matsubara, a Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) lawmaker wanting to know if the government would suspend trade and remittances to the DPRK under the revised Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Control Law.

"Japan on DPRK Economic Sanctions" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

2. Japan Anti-Terror Specialists

Japan's defense agency plans to create three specialist units of soldiers devoted to international missions, anti-terrorism and missile defense as early as 2006, a report said. The scale of the units is yet to be determined but they are likely to number more than 5,000 in total, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun said, adding they would consist mainly of ground troops. The plan will be included in new defense guidelines expected to be decided by the government this year.

"Japan Anti-Terror Specialists" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

3. Greenspan on Japan Economy

The "awesome" scale of Japan's accumulation of dollar reserves could become "problematic" for the Japanese economy, Alan Greenspan, chairman of the US Federal Reserve, said last night. "It must be presumed that the rate of accumulation of dollar assets by the Japanese government will have to slow at some point and eventually cease," he said in a speech in New York. Greenspan has spoken about Asian central banks three times in the past month, stressing that their continuing intervention in the dollar cannot be sustained. However, it is unusual for him to single out a particular country's policy for such blunt commentary.

"Greenspan on Japan Economy" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 2, 2004)

Russia Far East

1. Russia on DPRK 'Right' to Nuclear Development

The international community should show more flexibility toward the DPRK's peaceful nuclear program, Russian Ambassador to Seoul Teymuraz O. Ramishvili said on Thursday. The international community should show more flexibility toward the DPRK's peaceful nuclear program, Russian Ambassador to Seoul Teymuraz O. Ramishvili said on Thursday. "International law does not permit the international community to restrict North Korea's right to develop nuclear resources for peaceful purposes," the Russian diplomat stated.

"Russia on DPRK 'Right' to Nuclear Development" (NAPSNet Daily Report, March 5, 2004)

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