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New York Times

May 12, 2004

A Flurry Of Diplomacy In Asia On Eve Of Arms Talks

By James Brooke

SEOUL, South Korea, May 11 - Tokyo is abuzz with reports that the prime minister of Japan is planning a visit to North Korea. Meanwhile, South Korea and North Korea are organizing a meeting of army generals, the highest level inter-Korean military meeting in decades.

Pieces in Northeast Asia's long frozen security puzzle are starting to shift as envoys from the United States, China, Japan, Russia and the two Koreas converge Wednesday in Beijing for midlevel talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

"The North Koreans have been told by the Chinese: 'Cool it, tone down the rhetoric, don't look like a belligerent power to the world'," Selig S. Harrison, an expert on North Korea, said by telephone from his office at the Center for International Policy in Washington.

While North Korea waits to see what happens in the American presidential election, he said, it is taking conciliatory steps toward the United States' two closest allies in the region, Japan and South Korea.

In Tokyo, newspapers reported Tuesday that Japanese diplomats were preparing a visit by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to Pyongyang in late May. According to these reports, Mr. Koizumi will travel to North Korea's capital to

take back to Japan the children of five Japanese who had been abducted by North Korea and whom he brought home on an earlier trip, in September 2002.

Mr. Koizumi's popularity soared after that trip, only to sink after the Japanese public realized that the abductees' children had been left behind and that North Korea had kidnapped many more Japanese. With elections in Parliament's upper house set for July, Mr. Koizumi may see a narrow window to raise his popularity with a dramatic move.

Mr. Koizumi has been coy, telling reporters on Monday, "Media reports seem to be saying various things, but there is nothing I can say at this point."

Japanese officials are wary of irritating the Bush administration, which wants a united front of North Korea's neighbors in dealing with the North's nuclear weapons program. Japanese and North Korean negotiators are expected to meet separately during the nuclear talks in Beijing this week.

Hiroiyuki Hosoda, Mr. Koizumi's chief cabinet secretary, cautioned Monday that "there are a number of things that need to be worked out before a summit can be held." But he stressed that North Korea had recently shown a new "willingness to advance dialogue."

In legislation aimed at North Korea, the Japanese Parliament recently passed a law allowing economic sanctions against any country threatening Japan's national security. Now it is considering a bill to ban port calls by designated ships. On Tuesday, the North's official Korean Central News Agency urged Japan to think twice about the "disastrous consequences" that would follow sanctions.

North Korea is also trying to drive a wedge between the United States and South Korea, where members of a newly elected liberal majority in the National Assembly take their seats on May 30.

North Korea welcomed South Korean relief aid for the April 22 train explosion in Ryongchon, allowing a convoy of 20 trucks to cross the demilitarized zone on Friday and a ship with steam shovels and steel girders to dock Monday near the site of the blast. And on Friday, the North accepted a South Korean invitation for high-level military talks, a rarity for two countries still technically at war.

"This is a proof that economic exchanges and cooperation will lead to building up trust in military affairs as well," Jeong Se Hyun, South Korea's unification minister, told reporters on Saturday on returning here from Pyongyang. Next month, the new National Assembly is expected to debate dropping North Korea's classification as an enemy from South Korea's National Security Law.

In a measure of growing inter-Korean economic cooperation, Hyun Jung Eun, the chairwoman of South Korea's Hyundai Group, arrived Tuesday in Pyongyang to meet officials involved in the group's business projects in the North.

Against this rising tide of inter-Korean peaceful coexistence, conservative newspapers in South Korea published articles last week saying satellite photographs indicate that the North is building new bases to launch missiles with ranges long enough to hit Okinawa or Guam, islands with American bases.

"They have never stopped in their missile development plan; they are continuing it," said Kim Tae Woo, an arms control expert at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, adding that he could not confirm the newspaper reports. Noting that North Korea has intensified its "smile diplomacy," he warned, "Their appeasement posture is designed to separate Japan and South Korea from the United States."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/12/international/asia/y12kore.html>

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Los Angeles Times

May 12, 2004

Panama To Sign Shipping Accord

The anti-terrorism deal will allow the U.S. Navy to board the nation's commercial vessels.

By Carol J. Williams, Times Staff Writer

PANAMA CITY — The U.S. Navy will be allowed to board Panamanian-registered commercial ships to search for weapons of mass destruction under a deal to be signed today by the two nations in Washington.

The agreement could help ease tensions sparked by U.S. claims that Panama was failing to ensure that ships flying its "flag of convenience" complied with tough new anti-terrorism measures. Thousands of Panamanian-flagged ships could be barred from U.S. and European ports if they failed to meet the new requirements by July 1.

The Central American nation's economic lifeline would be threatened if Panamanian ships were barred from many foreign ports. Panama's maritime industry brings in about \$300 million a year. Its registry accounts for 26% of the global fleet and licenses more ships and seafarers than any other nation, thanks to low taxes and minimal labor regulations.

The shipping industry here has recently been roiled by new allegations of corruption, which ship owners say are keeping them from meeting the new security requirements.

Unlike other so-called flag states, Panama snubbed safety stalwarts such as Lloyd's Register and the American Bureau of Shipping to award monopoly control of its security certification program to a little-known private company in Florida. The firm, Phoenix Vessel Services, has been charging at least three times the fees set elsewhere for compliance reviews.

The exclusive deal has exposed Panamanian-registered vessels to more scrutiny by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Ships on Panama's registry already are designated priority targets for boarding because of the country's record of lax enforcement. Panama is at the top of an international maritime blacklist because many ships on its registry have had excessive detentions by port authorities over safety or security concerns.

After the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, the London-based International Maritime Organization adopted new security standards, requiring all vessels to work out plans to prevent terrorists, pirates, smugglers and stowaways from gaining access to ships or cargo.

By late April, only 60% of the 5,526 Panamanian-registered vessels subject to the new security constraints had been certified as in compliance, the daily newspaper La Prensa reported, citing maritime authority figures.

Maritime lawyers blame the slow pace of compliance on the government's procedures, which require ship owners to hire one company to develop their security plans, another — Phoenix — to assess and approve them, and a third to get their certificates from the Panama Maritime Authority.

"It was quite a shock for the industry when Panama said ship owners had to use this one, single company," said attorney Jazmina Rovi, a member of the Panama Maritime Law Assn.

"We are not arguing the capabilities of Phoenix," Rovi said. "They have been very efficient.

"What made no commercial sense was to make this exclusive. It raised a lot of questions about what prompted that decision, and corruption went through a lot of people's minds."

Phoenix cut its fees by about 25% late last year in response to industry accusations of gouging, and the government in January named two other companies to conduct the security assessments.

Other maritime states placed compliance monitoring in the hands of internationally known groups such as Lloyd's Register and the American Bureau of Shipping. ABS, a not-for-profit organization, has been authorized to conduct security plan reviews by more than 40 maritime countries, said spokesman Stewart Wade.

"The Panamanian government's view is that security plans should be done by security experts and not marine safety officials, that it's a new field for everyone," said Eduardo de Alba, a maritime attorney.

He noted that "Panama's position is not being replicated elsewhere" among other flag-of-convenience states such as Liberia, the Bahamas and the Marshall Islands.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-ships12may12,1,5490432.story?coll=la-headlines-world>

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Los Angeles Times

May 12, 2004

THE WORLD

Accusing Syria of Aiding Terrorists, Bush Imposes Sanctions

By Megan K. Stack, Times Staff Writer

CAIRO — President Bush banned all exports to Syria except food and medicine Tuesday, fulfilling a long-standing threat to impose sanctions against a country the United States accuses of sheltering terrorists and undermining the reconstruction of Iraq.

Syria's alleged misdeeds were "sufficiently grave to constitute a threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the United States," Bush said in a message to Congress.

The sanctions also ban Syrian airlines from flying to or from the United States; restrict relations between U.S. banks and the Syrian national bank; and authorize the U.S. Treasury Department to freeze assets of Syrian nationals allegedly involved in terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, occupation of Lebanon or terrorism in Iraq.

Syrian officials scoffed at the move. Many Syrians believe the United States is punishing them for their nation's defiant stance toward Israel.

"We're resigned to it, and we're not worried that it will have a significant effect," said Nabil Sukkar, a former World Bank economist. "The only effect will be psychological. It will damage Syria's image, and that's what we're concerned about."

Syrian Prime Minister Naji Otari issued a statement Tuesday contending that his nation was "capable of facing the challenge [of sanctions] and overcoming their ramifications."

The sanctions come during a difficult period for Syria. Violence has shattered the usual calm there this year as

Kurdish riots swept the country and militants staged an attack in the heart of Damascus' diplomatic quarter. Analysts interpreted the violence as cracks in the government's grip on the populace.

"The regime prides itself on stability," said a Western diplomat. "It's the one thing it's been able to provide."

Last year, when Baghdad fell to U.S.-led forces, many Syrians worried that Damascus could be next. But some swagger has recently been creeping back into Syrian rhetoric. The bloodier and more chaotic Iraq becomes, the more Syrians take comfort in the idea that America won't have the will or political ability to take on another Arab government.

"It's gotten so bad that America is oscillating between asking Syria for help on Iraq or chastising Syrians for opposing the resistance," said Georges Jabbour, a Syrian lawmaker.

In December, Congress passed the Syrian Accountability Act to prod Bashar Assad's regime to fall in line with U.S. policy. The act outlawed any exports to Syria that might have military uses but allowed U.S. companies to continue doing business in the country. Syria was criticized for allegedly allowing Arab guerrillas to slip over the border into Iraq to join the anti-American insurgency.

The Bush administration also accused Syria of developing weapons of mass destruction, particularly chemical and biological weapons.

Damascus has denied the weapons claims, and some Syrian officials have said the entire region should disarm — meaning Israel should be stripped of its nuclear weapons.

Many Syrians believe they have a right to such weapons as long as they're at war with Israel.

"We have weapons that will allow us to defend ourselves if we are attacked," said Zuheir Jannan, a longtime government spokesman. "To make sure that if there is a war of aggression against Syria, not only Syrian women would cry, but Israeli women would cry too."

America has long criticized Syria for harboring members of Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and for supporting the Lebanon-based group Hezbollah.

Western diplomats say guns for Hezbollah are still moving through Syria en route to Lebanon from Iran. Khaled Meshaal, a powerful Hamas leader, lives in Damascus.

Syria says the militant organizations keep only media offices in Damascus. As for Meshaal, "we consider him a Palestinian leader fighting for the liberation of his land," Jannan said.

"These groups are engaged in a violent attempt to block the peace process, to block Palestinian aspirations and to kill innocent people," the State Department's Richard Boucher said.

The U.S. has also called on Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, which is under the de facto control of its eastern neighbor. Syrians contend that Lebanon wants their soldiers to stay in order to keep the peace.

Times staff writers Paul Richter and Mary Curtius in Washington contributed to this report.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-syria12may12,1,2077960.story?coll=la-headlines-world>

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USA Today
May 13, 2004
Pg. 8

North Korea Suggests Peace Treaty To Settle Nuclear Dispute

By Barbara Slavin, USA Today

WASHINGTON — North Korea said Wednesday that the best way to resolve its nuclear standoff with the United States would be to replace a 51-year-old armistice with a peace treaty ending the Korean War, to be signed by North Korea, South Korea and the United States.

The comment, in a rare interview with Han Song Ryol, North Korea's deputy representative to the United Nations, appeared to reflect North Korea's growing frustration with slow-moving six-nation nuclear disarmament talks in Beijing. Labeled by President Bush as part of an "axis of evil" with Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the North Korean government says a peace treaty would be a deterrent to an attack by the United States.

The Bush administration says it might talk about a peace treaty but only after North Korea agrees to the United States' long-standing demand for "complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement" of its nuclear program.

Han said North Korea would show "patience and flexibility" in talks that resumed Wednesday in Beijing, but he doubted they would make progress. He said his country would have to hold onto nuclear weapons unless "all the countries with troops on the Korean peninsula" reach a permanent peace.

Han, the top North Korean official in this country who deals with the United States, spoke by phone from New York in his first interview with an English-language newspaper in nearly two years.

Han disputed comments attributed to Abdul Qadeer Khan, a Pakistani who ran a black market in nuclear components until last year, that Khan saw three nuclear bombs in North Korea in 1999. Han said it would make no

technical or strategic sense to put "three nuclear bombs at the same place." The report about Khan appeared in *The New York Times* on April 13.

North Korea is said to have enough plutonium for eight bombs. Material for six apparently was produced after North Korea expelled foreign inspectors in January 2003. The crisis over its nuclear program began in October 2002, when the Bush administration claims North Korea admitted to U.S. diplomats that it was secretly trying to enrich uranium, in violation of a 1994 agreement. North Korea denies this.

The administration has suggested that North Korea follow the example of Libya, which agreed last year to give up all its weapons of mass destruction programs and opened the country to inspection. Han said North Korea wouldn't do that but would welcome direct talks like those that preceded the Libya breakthrough. "Back-channel, secret or any kind of direct talks in my opinion could produce tremendous, significant results," he said.

Han's comments came as North Korea continued to improve relations with South Korea. The two countries have expanded economic ties and agreed to hold high-level military talks next week. North Korea also appears closer to settling differences with Japan over releasing relatives of Japanese people abducted to teach their language in North Korea in the 1970s. Five were freed last year.

Han denied speculation that North Korea was trying to improve relations with South Korea and Japan in order to isolate the United States. "It is not our strategy to put a wedge between countries but to improve relations with all countries," he said.

<http://www.usatoday.com/usatoday/20040513/6198484s.htm>

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New York Times

May 14, 2004

Libya Halts Military Trade With North Korea, Syria And Iran

By Judith Miller

Following on its renunciation of unconventional weapons, Libya announced Thursday that it would stop all military trade with countries that spread such weapons, including, according to its Foreign Ministry, North Korea, Syria and Iran.

At the State Department, John R. Bolton, the under secretary of state for arms control, welcomed the declaration, particularly Libya's halt of its decades-old trade in missiles with North Korea.

Speaking a few hours after the Foreign Ministry released the announcement to JANA, the government news service in Tripoli, Mr. Bolton called Libya's action "an important step forward and an indicator of Libya's seriousness in abandoning weapons of mass destruction."

But while Bush administration officials were praising Libya for its latest step in fulfilling its vow in December to give up its unconventional weapons, European diplomats and senior United Nations officials were intensifying their criticism of Libya for handing down death sentences last week to five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor convicted of having infected more than 400 children with H.I.V., the virus that causes AIDS. In Strasbourg, France, on Thursday the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers expressed its "grave concern" about the death sentences. "In view of the recently expressed desire by the Libyan authorities for improving their relations with Europe," the statement from the 45-member group declared, "the Committee of Ministers calls for the immediate review of the verdict in this case."

On Tuesday, Secretary General Kofi Annan of the United Nations said he would contact senior Libyan officials about the nurses and the doctor "to see what can be done to help them." And at the State Department on May 6, after a criminal court in Benghazi ruled that the medical workers had deliberately infected the children with H.I.V.-contaminated blood in an experiment to cure AIDS, the department spokesman, Richard A. Boucher called the verdict and the sentences unacceptable.

One administration official said Thursday that such actions, coupled with the country's poor record on human rights and its previous support for terrorism, were impeding closer ties with Libya, despite its action on unconventional arms.

Libya's announcement of its halt to all military trade with states that spread unconventional weapons and related equipment had been expected. The New York Times reported in April that Libya had agreed to end military trade with North Korea after the Bush administration warned Libyan officials that the United States would not lift its trade sanctions against their country unless such a public declaration was issued.

But President Bush lifted most of the remaining restrictions on doing business with Libya last month, praising the government of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi for its decision to rid itself of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the systems to deliver them.

One official said Thursday that Libya still had to end support for terrorism before it could be removed from Washington's list of states that sponsor terrorism, which bars them from buying American military equipment or doing business with major American financial institutions that make loans and insure sales.

But the praise on Thursday from Mr. Bolton reflects the priority the administration places on its effort to stop the spread of the world's deadliest weapons to terrorist groups and anti-American, unpredictable states like North Korea. Mr. Bolton praised Libya in particular for halting trade with North Korea, which he said had sold Libya five long-range Scud-C missiles and had made contracts to extend the range of Libya's shorter-range missiles and to maintain the missiles. While Mr. Bolton would not estimate the total amount of such trade, another senior administration official said Libya's action would cost North Korea "tens of millions of dollars that it uses for its own unconventional weapons programs."

Although Libya's formal announcement did not specifically identify the countries with which it was halting military trade, Libyan officials specified that the ban would apply to North Korea, Syria and Iran, American officials said. The administration is trying to show Iran and North Korea, through Libya, that there are tangible benefits in abandoning unconventional weapons programs.

The administration also has accused Syria of having ambitious programs to develop unconventional weapons, though Syria has denied the charges.

After months of debate within his administration, President Bush imposed economic sanctions against Syria on Tuesday on the grounds that Damascus had failed to take action against terrorist groups fighting Israel, stop foreign fighters from entering Iraq or curb unconventional weapons programs. The executive order Mr. Bush signed bans virtually all American exports to Syria except food and medicine, and it bars flights between the two countries except during emergencies. The president also told the Treasury Department to freeze the assets of Syrians with known ties to terrorism, unconventional weapons, the Syrian military presence in Lebanon or resistance activities in Iraq.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/14/international/africa/14liby.html>

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Washington Times

May 14, 2004

Pg. 5

Inside The Ring

By Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough

Nuke penetrator

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld was asked during a Senate hearing this week about Pentagon plans to develop an earth-penetrating nuclear weapon.

"A decision to go forward with an earth penetrator has not been made," Mr. Rumsfeld told the Senate Appropriations Committee. "The decision to determine whether it's possible to have one that could help solve some potential problems has been made."

The Bush administration is spending \$485 million in the next five years to study whether it's possible to make a high-yield nuclear bomb capable of burrowing through solid rock before detonating. The bomb is the ideal weapon for hitting underground weapons-of-mass-destruction sites — nuclear, chemical and biological arms facilities protected by deep bunkers.

Earth-penetrating nuclear bombs are not unique to the Bush administration, as some antinuclear weapons advocates say. The Clinton administration had been studying the use of nuclear weapons to destroy underground facilities since the early 1990s.

Mr. Rumsfeld made clear that he supports the bomb, if it can be built. He noted underground facilities in North Korea and Iran.

The secretary said underground military sites are "pervasive in country after country," noting that "North Korea is a perfect example."

"We have found this in country after country, and the question is: If that is a problem, what might be done about it?" Mr. Rumsfeld said.

The first choice for dealing with the problem would be a conventional bomb, but a penetrating nuclear bomb is something "at least in my view, worth studying."

Any decision to build the new bomb would involve Congress, he said.

<http://www.washtimes.com/national/inring.htm>

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Chemical and Biological Defense: DOD Needs to Continue to Collect and Provide Information on Tests and on Potentially Exposed Personnel.

GAO-04-410, May 14.

<http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-410>

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