



Morning Alert - Monday, February 6, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

Most networks gave top play to reports that the incumbent Chiyoda Ward mayor backed by Tokyo Governor Koike was reelected on Sunday, noting that he won a resounding victory over his rivals, including the LDP-backed candidate. NTV led with a report that table tennis players Ai Fukuhara and Chiang Hung-chieh held a wedding reception on Sunday.

Front-page items in national dailies included a decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit to dismiss the Justice Department's request to restore President Trump's immigration restrictions on travelers from seven Muslim-majority nations and the results of yesterday's Chiyoda Ward mayoral election.

SECURITY

Secretary Mattis affirms U.S. security commitment to Senkakus

Weekend papers and Friday and Saturday TV news programs gave extensive coverage to Secretary of Defense Mattis' series of meetings with senior Japanese officials, including Prime Minister Abe on Friday and Defense Minister Inada on Saturday, with broadcasters also providing in-depth profiles of the Secretary. The new Pentagon leader underscored the U.S. commitment to the defense of Japan, including the continued provision of the nuclear umbrella and U.S. military support in the event of a contingency in the Senkaku Islands. He clearly stated that the outcrops in the East China Sea fall under the scope of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. The two sides also agreed to increase mutual security collaboration in view of North Korea's continued nuclear and missile provocations and China's maritime push. They also reaffirmed the two governments' resolve to reduce U.S. military

footprint in Okinawa and move forward with the present plan to build the FRF off Camp Schwab based on the judgment that it is the “only solution.” The U.S. official did not bring up Japan’s host nation support for the U.S. military in any of his meetings with Japanese politicians. In his meeting with Foreign Minister Kishida on Friday evening, Secretary Mattis agreed to convene a bilateral 2+2 foreign and defense ministerial meeting at an early date.

Sunday dailies highlighted the Secretary’s press conference following his meeting with DM Inada on Saturday, during which he characterized China’s maritime advancement as “confrontational,” and explained the U.S.’s policy of continuing “freedom of navigation operations” in the South China Sea. On the Senkakus, the Secretary confirmed that because the uninhabited isles are territories under Japanese administration, they are covered by the bilateral security treaty. On Japan’s financial cost for hosting U.S. troops, the DOD chief said: “We can point to our Japanese-American cost-sharing approach as a model for other nations to follow.” MOD officials were reportedly pleasantly surprised by this remark.

The papers said the focus of attention is now shifting to whether President Trump will echo the same U.S. security assurances to Japan during his summit with PM Abe on Feb. 10 because the President has often made statements that contradict those of his cabinet members. Sunday’s Asahi described the somewhat uneasy relations between the President and the Secretary over such issues as waterboarding and the appointment of the Army secretary, adding that GOJ officials wonder whether the Pentagon’s pro-Japan stance is shared by the White House. Sankei emphasized that stability in the Trump administration’s Asia policy depends on whether Secretary Mattis will be able to enlist support from National Security Advisor Flynn and Chief Strategist Bannon, who both reportedly wield enormous influence within the West Wing.

GOJ pleased with Mattis’ statements

All papers wrote that the Abe administration was extremely pleased with remarks made by the new U.S. defense chief regarding the Trump administration’s intention to continue to engage with Asia, including the guarantee of Japan’s security, especially because President Trump’s Asia strategy remains elusive. Tokyo is reportedly hopeful that the Secretary’s remarks on the Senkakus serve as a stern warning to China not to engage in unilateral actions to alter the status quo. Sankei quoted Prime Minister Abe as telling his deputies after his meeting with the Secretary: “We reached a consensus on all aspects. I found him to be smart.” According to Nikkei, an unnamed high-ranking GOJ official said it was “ideal” that Japan obtained Washington’s security assurances soon after the launch of the new U.S. administration. GOJ officials are giving greater weight to the general-turned-secretary on account of his professional expertise and high integrity, with a senior MOD official saying: “If President Trump defers to Secretary Mattis on Asian policy, there will be no confusion.” The fact that PM Abe unexpectedly joined an informal dinner for the Secretary hosted by Defense Minister Inada on Friday evening showed the Japanese government’s gratitude for the U.S. official’s

statements on the U.S.-Japan alliance. Sankei claimed the GOJ has now concluded that the issue of Japan's financial support for the U.S. military which had been raised by President Trump has been resolved, quoting PM Abe as telling his associates: "We no longer need to concern ourselves with this matter. It's over."

However, Japanese officials are still afraid that President Trump may use the security alliance as affirmed by his defense czar as a "quid pro quo" to obtain Tokyo's concessions on auto and other trade issues. As for the simmering apprehension that President Trump may press Japan to make concessions on the trade front in return for easing his pressure on security issues, PM Abe reportedly told the Diet on Friday: "Such an approach would be extremely unproductive. As Japan's ally, the U.S. should not take such an approach."

Japan likely to increase defense budget

Most papers noted that while praising Japan's enactment of the comprehensive security laws and other initiatives to expand its security role, Secretary Mattis also called for additional Japanese efforts by saying at Saturday's press event: "There is no complacency in terms of the alliance. We know we must adjust to the changing security situation." They projected that the Abe administration will expand the scope of SDF operations to further strengthen coordination with the U.S. military, with Asahi adding that defense hawks within the ruling LDP will perhaps exploit this U.S. pressure to increase defense spending. Mainichi predicted that the Abe administration may choose to expedite consultations with the U.S. military on division of labor given that a drastic increase in defense budget will be difficult. Nikkei said options that Tokyo may pursue to beef up SDF capabilities include the procurement of a new missile interception system, and the joint development with the U.S. of unmanned drones and stealth fighters.

In related stories, most Monday papers took up remarks made on a Sunday talk show by DM Inada, who said that although the GOJ supports the U.S. military's "freedom of navigation" operations in the South China Sea, it has no plans for MSDF ships to participate in the program. The minister also ruled out the possibility of Japan offering logistics support for the U.S.-orchestrated coalition operations to defeat ISIL. On her meeting with Secretary Mattis on Saturday, Inada said: "I was able to build a relationship of trust with him and share the same perception of the security environment around Japan."

Mattis keen to dispel Asian concerns about U.S. engagement

Saturday's Mainichi reported that by traveling to East Asia soon after taking the helm of the DOD, Secretary Mattis hoped to make clear the Trump administration's determination to continue to engage with Asia in the belief that its alliance relationships with Japan and South Korea are critical when the U.S. has to deal with security challenges in multiple theaters, including the South China

Sea and the Middle East. Sunday's Nikkei asserted that the Secretary's Asian tour was designed to reassure Tokyo and Seoul, who have become extremely nervous about the prospects of their relations with Washington on account of the series of "broad-sides" from President Trump on the campaign trail.

Onaga unhappy about Secretary Mattis' remarks on Futenma relocation

Sunday papers reported from Washington on visiting Okinawa Governor Onaga's press remarks on Friday regarding the confirmation made by Defense Secretary Mattis and Prime Minister Abe that the present Henoko relocation plan is the only viable option. Onaga said: "It is an insult to the Okinawan people.... My resolve to thwart the FRF construction will not change."

Okinawa leader accomplishes little in traveling to U.S. capital

Sunday's Asahi and Yomiuri reported on Okinawa Governor Onaga's trip to Washington aimed at requesting the Trump administration's consent for conducting a review of the Henoko relocation plan. The papers said his trip did not produce the intended results because he failed to hold talks with key officials. The DOS Japan Desk director explained to the governor that the current plan is the only solution. The daily added that the governor's political standing in Okinawa has been shaken due to the recent resignation of his top deputy to take responsibility for an influence peddling scandal and the defeat of a candidate backed by him in the Miyakojima mayoral election in January.

Ships arrive off Henoko in preparation for reclamation work

Most papers wrote this morning that several large vessels arrived off the coast of Camp Schwab yesterday to start today placing gigantic concrete blocks on the ocean floor for the installation of underwater fences designed to prevent sand and dirt from spreading in preparation for bank protection work ahead of landfill operations in the area. Sankei added that if Governor Onaga chooses to cancel in late March the existing permit for rock reef destruction that is necessary to carry out the aforementioned operations, the central government is likely to rescind the governor's decision by proxy.

Suga asks for local support for relocation of aircraft wing to Iwakuni

All Monday papers reported that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga met with Yamaguchi Governor Muraoka and Iwakuni Mayor Fukuda separately on Sunday and asked for their support for the planned transfer of carrier-borne aircraft squadrons from NAF Atsugi to MCAS Iwakuni beginning in November this year. Suga promised to make utmost efforts to address local concerns about aircraft safety and noise pollution as well as calls for additional central government subsidies for economic revitalization.

U.S., Japan conduct missile defense test

Most Sunday papers reported on an announcement made by the MOD's Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency on Saturday that it carried out a joint missile interception test with the U.S. Missile

Defense Agency off Hawaii, noting that an MSDF ship successfully test-fired an SM-3 Block IIA interceptor.

Price of F-35 slashed

Several Sunday papers reported on the Pentagon's announcement on Friday that Lockheed-Martin has agreed to cut the price of 90 F-35 fighters by 7.3% to about \$94.6 million per unit, noting that four of these state-of-the-art stealth aircraft will be procured by the ASDF.

Okinawa Marine arrested for DUI

Most Monday papers reported briefly in their city news sections that an Okinawa Marine was arrested for driving a vehicle under the influence of alcohol in Naha City early Sunday morning, noting that he has admitted to the charge. The 20-year-old suspect initially told the police that he was not a U.S. service member.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe taking soft line toward U.S. leader to seek "practical benefits"

This morning's Yomiuri wrote in a prominent inside-page story that Prime Minister Abe has avoided criticizing and even voiced a certain degree of understanding toward President Trump's controversial policies and ideas on immigration and a bilateral free trade accord, probably in a bid to win his trust before their summit on Feb. 10. The paper claimed that Abe's ultimate goal is to encourage the President to take a conciliatory approach toward Tokyo on the security and economic fronts and hence obtain "practical benefits." The prime minister reportedly told his aides: "It is critical for Japan to demonstrate to China that the U.S. and Japan are so close that it can't drive a wedge between us." Abe has reportedly dismissed the concerns held by some ruling party officials that he is being too conciliatory toward the U.S. leader by telling his associates: "We have nothing practical to gain by criticizing President Trump. We would just be satisfying ourselves."

Japan's first lady to play golf with PM Abe and President Trump in Florida

Saturday's Nikkei reported that Prime Minister Abe's wife Akie and Ivanka Trump are likely to join Prime Minister Abe and President Trump if the two leaders play golf in West Palm Beach, Florida. Other papers ran similar stories, adding that some LDP officials are wary of the Japanese leader possibly getting too friendly with the President.

JAL, ANA to accept passengers from seven Muslim countries

Several Sunday papers wrote that following a ruling on Friday by a federal judge to temporarily end U.S. immigration restrictions under President Trump's executive order, JAL and ANA disclosed on Saturday that they will allow passengers from the seven designated Muslim-majority nations to board their flights bound for the U.S. The airlines have obtained confirmation from U.S. immigration authorities that such passengers will be admitted entry.

ECONOMY

Abe holds talks with Toyota leader

All Saturday morning papers reported that Prime Minister Abe met with Toyota President Toyoda on Friday evening, during which they apparently exchanged views on auto trade with the U.S. in preparation for the upcoming summit with President Trump. Although they did not disclose the details of what they discussed, the business executive apparently briefed the premier on the automaker's business plans in the U.S., including the pledged investment of \$10 billion in the next five years.

Mainichi said the session became a "murder board" to look into Japan's options to counter possible demands to be made by President Trump on Feb. 10 to rectify the auto trade imbalance. The prime minister is expected to underscore the considerable contributions that Japanese automakers and other companies have made to the U.S. economy by taking into account the input from the nation's top auto executive.

In related stories, several Saturday morning papers took up PM Abe's remarks at the Diet on Friday, in which he dismissed media speculation that the administration may use pension contributions paid by Japanese taxpayers to help the U.S. implement massive infrastructure projects. He said, "We are not considering that as an option. I have no control over the Government Pension Investment Fund" that the local media has mentioned as a tool that the premier may use to in order to solicit President Trump's understanding for Japan's willingness to support U.S. economic growth.

New Zealand to seek effectuation of TPP without U.S. membership

Sunday's Mainichi published a Jiji piece from Sydney saying that the trade minister of New Zealand, which is the TPP's depository, plans to travel to TPP member states later this month perhaps to explore the possibility of effectuating the regional free trade accord without the participation of the U.S. The article said Japan is taking a cautious view of such an idea.

Japanese farmers alarmed by possible free trade talks with U.S.

Yomiuri wrote this morning that many local farmers are bracing for the possibility that Japan may be forced by the Trump administration to enter into bilateral FTA talks on account of the nation's history of succumbing to U.S. pressure to liberalize its key agricultural markets, such as oranges in the early 1990s. They are afraid that under bilateral negotiations, Tokyo would be pressured to accept tougher trade provisions than under the TPP, as such U.S. farmers groups as the U.S. Meat Export Federation may step up their lobbying efforts toward the Trump administration to cut a better deal.

