



Morning Alert - Tuesday, May 2, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning News

NHK led with a report on the joint military exercises between the U.S. military and the South Korean military. TBS led with a report that a 14-year-old shogi player won 15 consecutive matches on Monday. Other top news included a report that President Trump said in a TV interview he would be willing to meet with Kim Jong Un under the “right circumstances.” All papers gave prominent front-page coverage to the MSDF’s escort of a U.S. military vessel off Shikoku.

## SECURITY

### MSDF vessel undertakes “asset protection”

All Tuesday papers reported on “U.S. asset protection” operations currently being performed by an SDF warship off the coast of Shikoku, explaining that in the first-ever mission set forth in the comprehensive security laws, the helicopter carrier Izumo is escorting a U.S. military supply ship to safeguard it from a possible military strike by North Korea. The two vessels rendezvoused off Tokyo on Monday afternoon and then steamed west in formation. The U.S. vessel is expected to provide refuel U.S. Navy ships, including the USS Carl Vinson Strike Group, which is currently deployed in the Sea of Japan in preparation for potential DPRK provocations. The asset protection operation will probably end today, with the U.S. vessel heading for the Sea of Japan and the Izumo going to its original destination of Singapore to participate an international naval parade.

The dailies said the escort mission only bears a symbolic meaning because the Japanese destroyer’s capability to defend other ships is limited and it is highly unlikely that North Korea would fire missiles at a U.S. warship in the Pacific. Yomiuri quoted a GOJ source as saying: “It is

inconceivable that the MSDF ship would use weapons in the mission. The primary purpose of the dispatch is to demonstrate the strong unity of the U.S.-Japan alliance.” However, Sankei and Nikkei declared that the escort operation shows that the trans-Pacific alliance has “entered a new phase.” Noting that the first asset protection mission signifies the growing “operational synchronization” of the U.S. Navy and the MSDF, the articles noted that the GOJ is keen to “establish a fait accompli” so that similar operations can be carried out eventually for U.S. Aegis destroyers in the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea to deter not only North Korea but also China.

Asahi said the U.S. military has pressed Japan to carry out asset protection operations for its warships in peacetime and so-called “gray zone situations” that fall short of military conflicts. The paper added that the GOJ chose to capitalize on the growing tension on the Korean Peninsula to conduct the “controversial” operation in the belief that the public would not strongly object to it now. Asahi and other papers expressed concern that as a result of greater defense synchronization, Japan could be “drawn into a U.S. conflict.” Nikkei underscored that the country will be exposed to greater security threats from nuclear-armed North Korea in the future unless Tokyo and Washington collaborate closely at this juncture.

### **U.S. shows consideration for Beijing, Seoul in dispatching Carl Vinson to peninsula**

Asahi wrote that the USS Carl Vinson Strike Group conducted a bilateral drill with the ROK military in the Sea of Japan on Monday, noting that the U.S. aircraft carrier flotilla avoided carrying out training in the Yellow Sea so as not to provoke China because the Trump administration is hoping to enlist Beijing’s cooperation in restraining Pyongyang. The U.S. Navy also chose not to conduct a trilateral exercise with Japan and South Korea this time around since negative sentiments toward Japan are mounting in South Korea ahead of the presidential election on May 9.

### **Guam-based USAF drone arrives at Yokota**

Sankei and Tokyo Shimbun reported that a USAF Global Hawk arrived at Yokota AB Monday night for temporary reconnaissance and surveillance operations, noting that four additional drones from Andersen AFB on Guam will also be stationed at the Tokyo facility through October as the Pacific island is buffeted by seasonal typhoons. Sankei added that the UAVs may engage in spy operations on North Korea.

### **Children touched guns on display at Atsugi base festival**

Asahi, Mainichi, and Tokyo Shimbun reported in their city news sections that during an open base event held at NAF Atsugi on Saturday, Japanese visitors, including children, touched machineguns on two Navy helicopters on display. The guns were removed in response to a request filed by two municipal governments.

## **INTERNATIONAL**

### **Abe, Trump hold teleconference to discuss Russia, North Korea**

Asahi and Nikkei took up the disclosure by several GOJ sources that Prime Minister Abe spoke by phone with President Trump on Monday, speculating that the two leaders discussed the premier's recent summit with Russian President Putin in Moscow and the situation in North Korea. The papers pointed out the GOJ did not make an official announcement on the teleconference, with Nikkei quoting a source as saying: "Since more teleconferences will be held in the future, an announcement may not be made every time.... Japan is the only nation that makes an announcement every time the premier speaks by phone with a foreign leader."

### **Europeans to join Japan, U.S., ROK in imposing sanctions on DPRK**

Yomiuri front-paged a report saying that diplomats from the U.S., Japan, South Korea, the UK, France, Germany, and Australia will assemble in Seoul today to discuss enhanced sanctions on North Korea with a possible nuclear test by the reclusive regime in mind. The session, which is part of the "new approach" to isolate Pyongyang economically and diplomatically that Secretary of State Tillerson announced during a recent UN Security Council meeting, is intended to prod China to use its leverage against the defiant neighbor.

### **Many Diet members to visit U.S. during Golden Week holidays**

Nikkei wrote that 26 Japanese parliamentarians plan to separately visit the U.S. during the Golden Week holidays. Former Defense Minister Onodera is set to listen to U.S. opinions on the LDP's idea of allowing the SDF to possess capabilities to strike enemy bases, while former Senior Vice Minister for Health, Labor and Welfare Takemi hopes to exchange views with congressional members on health insurance, which was not addressed in the bilateral economic dialogue held in Tokyo in April.

### **Kishida discusses North Korea with counterparts in central Asia**

Yomiuri reported from Turkmenistan that visiting Foreign Minister Kishida on Monday held talks with his counterparts from five central Asian nations, including Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, during which they agreed to enhance mutual coordination to dissuade North Korea from pursuing nuclear and missile development. They issued a joint statement condemning Pyongyang's relentless provocations. Noting that the participants also agreed to increase economic and cultural exchanges with Tokyo, the paper noted that Japan is anxious to deepen ties with these "resource-rich" Asian countries so as to weaken their diplomatic and economic dependence on China and Russia.

## **POLITICS**

### **Abe vows to amend Constitution**

All papers highlighted remarks by Prime Minister Abe on Monday voicing his strong desire to revise the nation's supreme law by saying: "I am determined to take a historic step this year without fail toward the major goal of constitutional amendment.... The number of people who view the Constitution as untouchable has dropped sharply. The time is ripe for us to present the people with an ideal constitutional draft." The premier made the comment at a Tokyo rally organized by proponents of constitutional revision.

Meanwhile, Asahi front-paged the results of its public opinion survey that put support for constitutional amendment at 41% and nonsupport at 50%. Almost 90% said the present Constitution has been "good for the country."

## **ECONOMY**

### **Effectuating TPP without U.S. still faces hurdles**

Most papers reported on a TPP chief negotiators' meeting to be held in Toronto for two days starting today. The papers noted that although Japan is hoping to effectuate the landmark regional free trade deal swiftly without the participation of the U.S., some members, such as Vietnam and Malaysia, are cautious about the idea since the economic benefits of such an arrangement would be limited for them. Sankei wrote that as the original accord effectively set February 2018 as the deadline for the effectuation, the GOJ is afraid that the momentum for trade liberalization will be lost without acting swiftly. Tokyo is also apprehensive that Peru and other members are considering the option of inviting China to join the pact.

## **SOCIETY**

### **Number of female researchers in Japan surges**

Monday evening's Nikkei focused on statistics compiled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications regarding the number of female researchers in Japan. As of March 2016, there were a record number of 138,400 female scholars nationwide, a 10% increase from four years ago. The proportion of women in academia was about 15.3%, also the highest ever. According to the data, the number of female researchers specializing in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in the private sector has been soaring. The daily speculated that more women are interested in research positions in these areas perhaps based on the assessment that they can work for a long time in such fields.

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