



Morning Alert - Wednesday, August 16, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK and TV Asahi gave top play to today's weather forecast, saying that it has been raining in Tokyo for 16 consecutive days. NTV led with a report on the torrential rain in Tokyo on Tuesday. Fuji TV reported on the heavy rainfall in Fukuoka on Tuesday. TBS gave top play to a report on whether it would be possible to simultaneously intercept the four ballistic missiles that North Korea is considering launching toward Guam.

Major front-page items in national papers included this year's National Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead on Tuesday and North Korea's apparent refraining from conducting provocations at least for the time being.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Tension between U.S., DPRK may ease as North Korean leader tones down rhetoric

All papers highlighted a comment reportedly made by North Korean strongman Kim Jong Un regarding his military's proposal on launching four ballistic missiles toward Guam. He was quoted as saying: "We will watch the foolish and stupid conduct of the Americans for a bit longer.... In order to prevent a dangerous military clash, the United States ... should make the right choice first and show it with actions." The papers said that with these remarks, the defiant leader was perhaps calling for the U.S. not to deploy B1 bombers and nuclear aircraft carriers near the Korean Peninsula. Since Kim's latest statement was less confrontational than previous ones, the dailies expressed hope that the rising tension between the U.S. and the outcast regime will ease somewhat. Sankei declared that Kim backed off in responses to the "infuriated" U.S. leader.

## **Washington, Pyongyang both seeking dialogue**

All papers wrote that the United States is apparently hoping to hold dialogue with North Korea, highlighting an op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal by Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Mattis saying the U.S. is willing to negotiate with Pyongyang. Regarding yesterday's teleconference between Prime Minister Abe and President Trump during which they reportedly agreed on the "foremost importance of preventing North Korea from launching ballistic missiles," Asahi said the premier avoided mentioning the word "pressure" when speaking to the press after the talks perhaps in an attempt to help boost the momentum for dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang. The paper wrote that Abe and other GOJ officials are apparently being careful not to use strong language against North Korea, quoting Defense Minister Onodera as saying: "President Trump has mentioned the need for dialogue. A settlement through dialogue would be best."

Mainichi speculated that the North Koreans are also apparently exploring dialogue with Japan and the U.S., claiming that DPRK Foreign Minister Ri sounded out Foreign Minister Kono on "holding dialogue at an early date" when they spoke briefly in Manila on Aug. 6. An unnamed senior MOFA official said: "There is no question that Pyongyang is seeking dialogue. We had better prepare for it... Washington is also inclined to relax the conditions for starting dialogue with the North." Sankei said, however, that some GOJ officials are alarmed by mounting sentiments within the Trump administration on taking a soft approach toward Pyongyang. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga commented on the op-ed by Mattis and Tillerson by telling the press: "Holding dialogue for the sake of dialogue is meaningless."

## **ROK leader takes issue with Japan's handling of wartime forced labor issue**

All dailies highlighted a speech delivered yesterday by ROK President Moon, who urged Japanese leaders to have the "courage" to resolve such history issues as the comfort women and the use of forced labor by Japanese companies during WWII. Noting that the issue of wartime forced labor has been construed by the previous ROK administrations as having been settled by the conclusion of the Japan-ROK pact on wartime compensation in 1965, the papers said if the incumbent administration chooses to take up the matter, it may hurt bilateral ties with Tokyo. The Japanese side has reacted sharply to Moon's remarks, with Yomiuri quoting a GOJ source as saying: "The issue of compensation for victims of forced labor has already been settled. Japan will never agree to hold negotiations."

Asahi explained that the Moon administration may be tempted to reexamine history issues with Tokyo since its solid supporters are strongly opposed to the previous Park administration's accomplishments, such as the comfort women agreement with Japan.

In a related development, several papers said Prime Minister Abe on Tuesday commented on the growing moves in South Korea to install comfort women statues across the nation by telling an LDP

lawmaker: “The goalposts [that were established by the 2015 comfort women accord with Seoul] will never be moved.”

### **Komeito chief to visit Russia**

Nikkei wrote that Komeito Chief Representative Yamaguchi plans to visit Moscow in September for talks with senior Russian officials, projecting that the ruling party leader will discuss such issues as North Korea and planned “joint economic activities” in the Northern Territories.

## **SECURITY**

### **Ospreys to participate in Hokkaido exercise**

All papers took up an announcement made by Defense Minister Onodera on Tuesday that USMC MV-22s will participate starting on Friday in an ongoing joint exercise between the U.S. military and the SDF in Hokkaido. As many as six Futenma-based tilt-rotor planes will airlift goods and personnel both during the day and at night as part of the training. According to Mainichi, the aircraft fly to Misawa AB today before flying to Hokkaido. Onodera was quoted as saying: “The U.S. military regards the planes as an important asset for the defense of Japan and East Asia. The Ospreys’ participation is very significant. We will ask the U.S. side to give maximum consideration to safety and minimize the impact on local residents when operating the aircraft.” Hokkaido Governor Takahashi told the press: “We will continue to urge the central government to thoroughly ensure the safety of the Ospreys.”

### **Okinawa affairs minister comments on SOFA**

Yomiuri quoted Okinawa Affairs Minister Esaki as saying yesterday: “Deficiencies in the SOFA should be rectified. It is important for Japan to have an egalitarian relationship [with the U.S.] so that we can have a say vis-à-vis the U.S. military.”

## **ECONOMY**

### **Japan worried about possible trade friction between U.S., China**

All papers reported heavily on President Trump’s instructions to the USTR to launch an investigation into China’s unfair trade practices on intellectual property, noting that Beijing has already reacted sharply to the U.S. move, which is partially intended to press it to restrain North Korea, and hinted at taking countermeasures by imposing retaliatory tariffs on American imports. Sankei said Japan is concerned about a possible trade war between Washington and Beijing, bracing for the Trump administration to try to “blackmail” other trading partners, including Japan, by suggesting punitive duties on steel imports with the goal of reducing U.S. trade deficits. Nikkei noted that Tokyo is opposed to the U.S.’s unilateral imposition of punitive duties on Chinese products based on Section 301 of the Trade Act since it would constitute a violation of WTO rules. However, the GOJ is also hoping that Beijing will improve its protection of intellectual property as a result of Washington’s

tough stance since Japanese firms have suffered from intellectual property violations by the Chinese.

### **U.S. beef prices soaring**

Nikkei front-paged a report saying that wholesale prices of U.S. beef products have been skyrocketing following the adoption of safeguard import restrictions on Aug. 1, saying that they are almost 40% higher than a year ago as a result of the increased tariffs. Restaurant operators are likely to cut back on their use of American beef.

## **POLITICS**

### **No cabinet ministers visited Yasukuni on war anniversary**

All papers reported that no Abe cabinet ministers paid homage at Yasukuni Shrine on Aug. 15, noting that this was the first time since 1980 that no cabinet officials of an LDP administration visited the Shinto memorial on the anniversary of Japan's defeat in WWII. Nikkei attributed the absence of Abe cabinet ministers this year to its consideration for China and South Korea, whose cooperation has become increasingly important in dealing with the DPRK's provocations.

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