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# JAPAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Morning Alert - Monday, August 21, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK, TBS, and TV Asahi led with reports on the U.S.-ROK joint military exercise that will start today, speculating that North Korea may stage a provocation in protest. NHK reported on PACOM Commander Harris's visit to Seoul on Sunday, during which he reportedly pledged the United States' commitment to defend South Korea against the North. NTV and Fuji-TV led with reports on the thundershowers in Tokyo on Sunday evening.

Main front-page items in national papers included a Defense Ministry plan to base GSDF Ospreys at an unspecified SDF facility temporarily instead of Saga Airport, Russian trade data pointing to a surge in petroleum exports to North Korea in the early half of this year, and the Defense Ministry's possible cancellation of the planned procurement of Global Hawk UAVs.

## AMBASSADOR

### Ambassador Hagerty pays courtesy call on prime minister

Most Saturday papers reported that Ambassador Hagerty met with Prime Minister Abe on Friday for the first time and described the U.S.-Japan alliance as "the greatest in the world." The Ambassador also said: "President Trump has the highest respect for the prime minister.... I assumed the post at a time when the two nations are confronted with a range of issues. I would like to deal with them together with the prime minister." While mentioning the escalated tension on the Korean Peninsula, Abe said: "We would like to coordinate with the Ambassador in enhancing the U.S.-Japan alliance.... We are very pleased with the appointment of Ambassador Hagerty in whom President Trump has strong confidence."

## SECURITY

### Japan may call off UAV introduction

Monday's Asahi front-paged the disclosure by several GOJ sources that the Defense Ministry is mulling cancellation of the planned procurement of three Global Hawks due to their high cost, noting that Defense Minister Onodera will make a final decision in the near future. According to the article, the suggested price of the three drones was about \$577 million, 23% higher than the original estimate of \$467 million. Northrop Grumman, the UAV's manufacturer, explained that developing the radar unique to Japanese specifications has added to the cost. Existing ministry regulations mandate a review of a defense hardware procurement initiative if the final price turns out to be 15% higher than the initial estimate. The daily added that GOJ officials are divided over whether or not to proceed with the UAV project, with proponents insisting on the need to enhance monitoring of North Korea and China, while opponents argue that the proposed UAVs' roles can be performed by existing spy satellites and electronic surveillance planes currently under development. An expected surge in military spending associated with the planned purchase of Aegis-ashore batteries makes some GOJ officials even more cautious about purchasing the Global Hawk.

### **Abe, Dunford confirm enhanced security coordination**

All Saturday morning papers reported on Friday's meeting at the Kantei between Prime Minister Abe and Chairman Dunford of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during which they affirmed strengthening coordination between the SDF and the U.S. military to be better prepared for North Korean provocations. While voicing gratitude for President Trump's repeated statements upholding the U.S. defense commitment to Japan and other allies, Abe promised additional Japanese efforts to enhance the trans-Pacific alliance. The top U.S. military official said in reply: "The U.S.-Japan alliance is truly ironclad especially in the military field."

### **U.S., Japan committed to stronger cooperation to deal with North Korea**

All Saturday morning papers carried follow-up stories on the 2+2 foreign and defense ministerial meeting, with their takes differing depending on their ideological bent. Conservative Sankei and center-right Yomiuri welcomed the confirmation of strong security collaboration made by the assembled ministers. It said the two nations, plus South Korea, are expected to reinforce tripartite unity so as to press China to rein in North Korea. Sankei said although Japan has to beef up its defense capabilities in line with the 2+2 accord, it has still stopped short of committing to the acquisition of hardware that can be used to strike enemy bases perhaps out of concern for probable domestic repercussions.

On the other hand, liberal papers expressed concern about Japan's promise to beef up its defense posture. Asahi said the Abe administration decided to introduce the costly Aegis-ashore batteries without holding sufficient debate at the Diet. Some GOJ officials are concerned that Japan may be charged by the U.S. an exorbitantly high price for introducing the ground-based missile defense platforms because the Trump administration is extremely keen to sell weapons abroad. Tokyo Shimbun claimed that in an attempt to maintain a friendly relationship with the U.S., the Abe administration chose to purchase the "very expensive" Aegis ashore system out of consideration for President Trump's "Buy American" campaign.

Meanwhile, Nikkei said some GOJ officials are apprehensive that the Trump administration may be tempted to cut a deal with North Korea by agreeing to hold dialogue without obtaining prior discussion with Japan in order to prioritize curbing North Korea's development of ICBMs capable of hitting the U.S. mainland. These officials are also afraid that Washington may be inclined to strike a deal with China with the goal of enlisting its cooperation in reining in the DPRK by halting "freedom of navigation operations" in the South China Sea and easing pressure on the trade front. Mainichi said although the U.S. and Japanese ministers agreed to enhance pressure on North Korea, Washington is likely to do so primarily on the diplomatic and economic fronts, speculating that the U.S. may ease the military pressure perhaps to encourage North Korea to come to the negotiating table.

In a follow-up development, all Monday papers wrote that Foreign Minister Kono and Defense Minister Onodera briefed Prime Minister Abe yesterday on the outcome of the 2+2 meeting. The premier reportedly instructed them to strengthen the bilateral alliance without fail.

### **Japanese Ospreys to be deployed at SDF base**

Monday's Yomiuri wrote in its lead story that the Defense Ministry has informally decided to deploy the five MV-22s the GSDF plans to introduce in the near future at an unspecified SDF installation as a stopgap measure, given that its original plan to base them at Saga Airport has hit a snag due to intense local opposition. The ministry is reportedly looking to earmark money for the temporary deployment in its FY2018 budget, with possible locations being Camp Takayubaru in Kumamoto Prefecture and Camp Kisarazu in Chiba Prefecture. According to the article, the selection of the site may not go smoothly because the crash of an Osprey off Australia has rekindled anxiety about the aircraft's safety.

### **Osprey takes part in Hokkaido drill**

Saturday morning's Asahi and Tokyo Shimbun wrote that on Friday one Futenma-based Osprey participated in ongoing U.S.-Japan exercises in Hokkaido, quoting James Harp, commander of Marine Aircraft Group 36, as telling the press: "The Osprey is a very viable platform that enhances capabilities to respond to contingencies." Tokyo Shimbun said the tilt-rotor plane made its maiden flight to Hokkaido amid strong opposition among some local residents, noting that the two governments prioritized enhancing the bilateral alliance over addressing safety concerns.

### **Three squadrons to be moved to Iwakuni from Atsugi**

Saturday morning's Asahi reported on the CNFJ announcement on Friday that three Atsugi-based carrier-borne squadrons will be relocated to MCAS Iwakuni this autumn, explaining that some 30 fighter jets will be based in the Marine base in western Japan. Three additional squadrons will be moved to Iwakuni by May next year. CNFJ added that for the purposes of refueling, training, and maintenance, these airplanes will continue to use NAF Atsugi "every now and then." CNFJ called NAF Atsugi an "important installation for the U.S.-Japan alliance."

**INTERNATIONAL**

## **DPRK paying close attention to U.S.-ROK military drill**

All papers reported over the weekend or Monday on the planned start today of the U.S.-South Korea defense exercise "Ulchi-Freedom Guardian," projecting that the scale and intensity of the annual drill may determine the future course of U.S.-North Korea relations. As the Kim regime is paying close attention to the drill to see whether Washington is prepared to ease pressure on it, the papers speculated that the Trump administration may choose to scale down the exercise in the hope that the DPRK discontinues provocations. The number of U.S. personnel to take part in the drill will reportedly be reduced by some 7,500 from last year to about 17,500. The dailies added that Pyongyang is very concerned about the possible participation of B-1 strategic bombers because of their high strike capability.

In a related development, most dailies reported today that PACOM Commander Harris met with the ROK defense minister in Seoul yesterday and reiterated the U.S. defense commitment to South Korea. Admiral Harris is expected to observe the Freedom Guardian exercise.

## **Architect of "Trump revolution" ousted**

All Sunday papers reported extensively on President Trump's dismissal of chief strategist Steve Bannon, saying that the "alt-right ideologue" was pushed out of the White House as a result of an intense power struggle with whom he called "globalists." They expressed hope that the prolonged turmoil in the Trump administration will be finally brought under control as a result of his departure since most deputies in the West Wing are now political and foreign policy moderates. The papers predicted that the ousting of the architect of the President's "America First" doctrine may alienate his core constituency, and as a result his political foundation may become vulnerable. They added that political confusion in Washington may continue because the primary source of a range of political troubles has been the President himself.

## **Kono to visit Middle East**

Saturday morning's Yomiuri reported that Foreign Minister Kono is likely to visit Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and Egypt starting on Sept. 8, noting that while in Cairo, he is expected to take part in a meeting of the "Japan-Arab political dialogue" to discuss the situation in Syria and Middle East peace. The top Japanese diplomat is also hoping to defuse the tension between Qatar and other Arab member states led by the Saudis.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Aso may visit Washington early next month**

Saturday morning's Sankei wrote that arrangements are underway for Deputy Prime Minister Aso to visit Washington around September 5 for informal talks with Vice President Pence in order to lay the groundwork for the second session of the bilateral economic dialogue to be convened in the U.S. capital in mid-October on the margins of the annual World Bank/IMF conferences. During the envisaged informal meeting next month, the two leaders are likely to identify specific trade items to be taken up in the economic dialogue and Japan's recent imposition of safeguards on U.S. beef imports.

## **Japan adopted beef safeguard in anticipation of China's "buying spree"**

Saturday morning's Nikkei delved into Japan's imposition of a safeguard against frozen U.S. beef imports, explaining that the GOJ adopted the protectionist step in reply to a surge in imports, which was triggered by the active purchase of American products by Japanese importers, who were afraid that U.S. beef would be in short-supply due to a probable sharp increase in demand for U.S. products in China. The daily said the Chinese government's announcement on May 11 regarding the resumption of U.S. beef imports for the first time in 14 years based on the U.S.-China "100-day action plan" prompted Japanese importers to buy American beef in massive volume, as they were deeply concerned that they may not be able to secure enough supplies of American products due to a probable "buying binge" by the Chinese. The daily urged the GOJ to conduct a review of the present mechanism of invoking safeguards in view of a likely global war over beef imports.

Meanwhile, Saturday's Sankei wrote that local restaurant operators are apprehensive that the GOJ may choose to adopt the safeguard on chilled U.S. beef imports.

### **POLITICS**

#### **Public split over casino bill**

Sunday's Yomiuri took up several rounds of public hearings organized by the GOJ regarding the proposed legislation on implementing integrated resorts featuring casinos, noting that the sessions exposed a deep schism between proponents and opponents of gambling. The former pins high hopes on such economic benefits as an increase in tourists and jobs, while the latter are concerned about gambling addiction. Some municipalities' initial enthusiasm for hosting gambling facilities has waned in response to the split in public opinion. Doubts about the prospects of the bill have also emerged following the growing unpopularity of the Abe cabinet.

#### **Additional by-election to be held in October**

All Sunday papers reported on the death of an LDP lawmaker from Niigata, saying that as a result, a by-election to choose his successor will be held on Oct.22. Explaining that it will be the third by-election to be held on that day and that all three will be held after the passing of LDP politicians, some LDP officials are afraid that losing even one of the three contests would deal a heavy blow to the Abe administration.