



Morning Alert - Tuesday, September 5, 2017

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that the UNSC is hoping to adopt a new sanctions resolution against North Korea as early as Sept. 11 in response its sixth nuclear test. All commercial networks also led with reports on the North, predicting that it may fire another ballistic missile over Japan in the near future. Fuji TV reported that there are signs that it may soon conduct another nuclear test.

All national dailies gave prominent front-page play to updates on North Korea's latest nuclear test, including Monday's UN Security Council meeting.

## INTERNATIONAL

### North Korea conducts nuclear test

All Monday papers gave extensive coverage to what North Korea is calling the successful completion of a hydrogen bomb test on Sunday, projecting that the tension on the Korean Peninsula is bound to escalate to an extremely dangerous level as a result. The blast associated with North Korea's sixth nuclear test was far more powerful than its previous tests and at least five times stronger than the one conducted a year ago. The papers said the Kim regime is determined to acquire the capability to develop nuclear-armed ICBMs that can reach the continental U.S. in order to ensure its survival. They expressed concern that North Korea may stage another serious provocation on its National Foundation Day on Sept. 9, possibly launching ballistic missiles toward Guam in an attempt to force the U.S. to acknowledge its status as a nuclear power. Today's papers

highlighted the South Korean government's projection that the North may fire an ICBM or SLBM over Japan toward the North Pacific in the near future.

### **Prime Minister Abe, President Trump agree to put more pressure on Pyongyang**

Prime Minister Abe and President Trump held a teleconference late Sunday night and agreed on the need to impose much stronger pressure on North Korea. It was the fourth time for the two leaders to speak by phone in six days. According to the dailies, teleconferences were also held between Foreign Minister Kono and Secretary of State Tillerson on Monday and National Security Secretariat Secretary General Yachi and National Security Advisor McMaster on Sunday, during which they confirmed enhanced bilateral and trilateral coordination with South Korea. FM Kono also met with Ambassador Hagerty on Sunday evening and called for U.S. cooperation to adopt a new UN Security Council resolution without delay.

The Monday evening editions of national dailies highlighted press remarks made on Sunday by Defense Secretary Mattis after a meeting at the White House on North Korea. The Pentagon chief reportedly said: "Any threat to the United States or its territories, including Guam, or our allies will be met with a massive military response, a response both effective and overwhelming." The papers also focused on a tweet by President Trump on the possibility of stopping all trade with countries doing business with the DPRK and Treasury Secretary Mnuchin's comment on a TV show repeating the President's idea, noting that the Trump administration is set to turn up the pressure on the North to an unprecedentedly high level.

Sankei said diplomatic options may be losing significance within the Trump administration, pointing out that Secretary Tillerson, whom the daily called a strong advocate for dialogue with Pyongyang, did not attend Sunday's White House meeting. Asahi wrote that the rhetoric against the DPRK used by senior Trump administration officials appears to be "heating up," speculating that the strong language reflects Washington's frustration with North Korea's ceaseless provocations. Explaining that taking military options and ending U.S. trade with nations doing business with the North would both be extremely difficult, the paper conjectured that America's harsh language is actually aimed at forcing China and Russia to abandon their soft stance and adopt a tough approach toward the defiant DPRK leader.

Sunday's Yomiuri claimed that the GOJ is anxious to maintain close communications with the USG out of concern that the U.S. leader may choose to launch limited military operations, running the risk of triggering a war that could engulf Japan. The paper added that the GOJ may be forced to conduct a swift review of its plan for evacuating Japanese citizens from South Korea in the event of a contingency.

### **U.S., Japan to propose additional sanctions at UN**

All Tuesday papers took up the opening of an emergency UN Security Council meeting on Monday, noting that U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley and Japanese representative Bessho called for the swift adoption of a much stronger sanctions resolution to penalize North Korea. While denouncing the DPRK nuclear test, the Chinese and Russian ambassadors insisted on finding a peaceful solution through dialogue.

Yomiuri said the GOJ is extremely keen to gather international support for a new resolution, pointing out that Foreign Minister Kono has met with the Tokyo-based ambassadors of almost all Security Council members, including U.S. Ambassador Hagerty, to seek their endorsement of the Japanese efforts. Prime Minister Abe has also held teleconferences with President Trump, ROK President Moon, and Russian President Putin. The papers predicted that heated debate will take place between the U.S.-Japan-ROK camp and the Russia-China bloc over such ideas as banning petroleum exports to North Korea and prohibiting imports of DPRK textiles.

### **Russia, China react sharply, yet remain cautious about upping the ante**

Sunday's papers said Prime Minister Abe held a teleconference with Russian President Putin, during which they shared the view that North Korea's latest reckless act constitutes a serious threat. Abe asked for Russia's cooperation in adopting a stern UN Security Council resolution against Pyongyang. The papers said China and Russia reacted sharply to the latest North Korean provocation, both issuing strongly worded statements denouncing it. Although Moscow and Beijing were more critical of North Korea this time, the dailies projected that they will continue to balk at adopting tough sanctions, such as a ban on the supply of oil to the DPRK. Abe plans to urge President Putin to agree on a strong UN resolution when they hold a summit in Vladivostok on Thursday on the margins of an international economic conference.

### **U.S. to step up freedom of navigation operations**

Several Sunday papers reported on the U.S. Navy's plan to increase the frequency of freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, noting that an aircraft carrier and planes may also be mobilized to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to defending free passage. China is bound to react sharply to the plan.

### **LDP vice president to visit Iran**

Sankei wrote that LDP Vice President Komura plans to visit Tehran today as Prime Minister Abe's special envoy and hold talks with President Rouhani, noting that this will be the senior LDP politician's seventh meeting with the Iranian leader. Explaining that Komura has maintained strong connections with Tehran, the article said he is hoping to act as a "bridge" between Iran and the Trump administration, which are increasingly at odds over Tehran's compliance with the landmark 2015 Iran nuclear accord.

### **Japan to donate used helicopter parts to Manila**

Saturday's Sankei reported that the GOJ has decided to provide used GSDF helicopter parts to the Philippines as part of its effort to counter China's maritime advancement in the South China Sea. Tokyo is also planning to export to Thailand a ground-based air defense radar system previously used by the ASDF.

## SECURITY

### **USFJ chief reiterates defense commitment to Japan**

Today's Asahi ran an exclusive interview with USFJ Commander Martinez, who underscored America's "absolute commitment" to the defense of Japan in the face of North Korea's escalated provocations. He said the U.S. military is prepared to respond to any unforeseen situation, explaining that PACOM has already implemented all necessary measures to defend Guam from a possible DPRK missile attack. Lt. Gen. Martinez said the U.S. will benefit from Japan's plan to procure Aegis Ashore batteries and that it is important for the U.S. military and the SDF to send a signal to Pyongyang that the two militaries are completely in sync so as to deter it from staging further provocations.

### **GOJ considering development of new missile defense system**

Sunday's Yomiuri claimed in its lead story that the GOJ is considering developing a new missile defense system using laser technology to intercept and neutralize enemy projectiles immediately after they are launched. Noting that the Defense Ministry has decided to earmark some 8.7 billion yen in FY2018 to accelerate research on high-powered laser technology, the article said the system is expected to be effective against missiles fired on lofted trajectories, noting that the existing interceptors are not capable of shooting down missiles traveling at high altitudes.

### **Some U.S. security experts willing to let Japan go nuclear**

Sunday's Sankei wrote in its top story that an increasing number of U.S. defense analysts, including former National Security Advisor Susan Rice, are becoming tolerant of the idea of allowing Japan to acquire nuclear weapons based on the assessment that it is becoming increasingly difficult for Washington to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile ambitions. The daily said such an idea may have been discussed behind-the-scenes under the former Obama administration. However, National Security Advisor McMaster has categorically dismissed it by saying that President Trump is committed to achieving denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. The daily added that calls are also growing in South Korea for the U.S. to redeploy tactical nuclear weapons in the face of its defiant northern neighbor's relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons. Other papers filed similar stories.

### **U.S. military says Osprey grounded in Oita due to engine trouble**

Saturday morning's Tokyo Shimbun took up an announcement by the U.S. Marines in Okinawa that one of its Futenma-based Ospreys has been grounded at Oita Airport since Tuesday because the pilot detected a problem with one of its engines that required a swift landing.

## **FCLP conducted at Atsugi for first time in five years**

Saturday's Tokyo Shimbun reported on the start of field carrier landing practice (FCLP) by carrier-borne aircraft at NAF Atsugi on Friday, noting that it was the first time for the U.S. military to carry out this type of training in five years. Local governments protested strongly due to the loud noise caused by the drill. The U.S. military reportedly justified the training on the grounds that Iwo Island could not be used due to inclement weather.

## **Okinawa prefectural assembly members to visit U.S.**

Saturday's Sankei wrote that an LDP Okinawa chapter delegation will visit Washington from Sept. 10 through 16 for talks with USG officials and members of Congress to convey their endorsement for the existing Futenma relocation plan. The local politicians are reportedly hoping to deepen coordination with the Trump administration in order to increase local support for the project.

## **U.S. sailor arrested on assault charge**

Tuesday's Asahi wrote that the Kanagawa police on Monday arrested a sailor stationed at Yokosuka Naval Base on suspicion of assault, explaining that he allegedly punched and injured a restaurant owner in Zushi City on Sunday night. The suspect, who was intoxicated at the time, has reportedly admitted to the charge.

## **POLITICS**

### **Maehara elected leader of Democratic Party**

All Saturday morning papers reported heavily on former Foreign Minister Maehara's victory over former Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano in Friday's Democratic Party presidential election. The papers noted that the conservative opposition leader may promote controversial ideas, such as a consumption tax hike and constitutional revision, even at the risk of alienating liberal party lawmakers. The papers speculated the largest opposition party's fate as a viable political group depends on whether the new leader will be able to restore party unity. Noting that Maehara has been reluctant to promote election cooperation with the Japanese Communist Party, the daily said his leadership will be tested in three Lower House by-elections scheduled for late October to replace LDP Diet members who died recently.

Today's papers reported that Maehara has decided to cancel his plan to appoint Shiori Yamao, a junior lawmaker from Aichi, as secretary general in the face of strong opposition from his key supporters, who insist that she does not have enough political experience to assume the party's No. 2 post. The new leader has instead asked veteran legislator Atsushi Oshima to assume the post. Explaining that the idea of tapping Yamao was meant to call public attention to his enthusiasm for empowering women and junior politicians, the papers said this episode demonstrates the disarray within the party, for which public support has eroded steadily due in part to repeated internal rifts. Yamao will probably be given the post of deputy president together with Edano.

Meanwhile, Maehara is expected to appoint Takeshi Shina, an outspoken junior politician from Iwate, as policy research council chairman. Maehara has also tapped Edano's close associate Akira Nagatsuma as election steering committee chairman in an apparent bid to enlist liberal party members' cooperation in revitalizing the largest opposition party. While Maehara plans to request approval of these leadership appointments during today's all-hands meeting of party Diet members, criticism of his about-face on Yamao may emerge, which is bound to weaken the new leader's grip on power.

### **Public disapproval of Abe exceeds approval**

Kyodo published the results of its latest public opinion poll conducted over the weekend that put support for the Abe administration at 44.5%, up 0.1 point from a month ago, and nonsupport at 46.1%, up 2.9 points. Some 51% of respondents said they did not have high expectations for newly-elected Democratic Party President Maehara.

Meanwhile, the results of Mainichi's latest public opinion survey put support for the Abe cabinet at 39%, and nonsupport at 36%. Support for the Democratic Party stood at only 5% despite the election of a new party president.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Deputy PM Aso cancels trip to Washington**

All Saturday papers wrote Deputy Prime Minister Aso canceled on Friday his planned trip to Washington at the last minute in accordance with instructions from Prime Minister Abe. While saying that Abe wanted Aso to stay in Japan amid rising tension over North Korea while Abe goes to Russia for a summit with Putin, Nikkei speculated that the U.S. side may have not been very eager to host Aso for a meeting with Vice President Pence in the first place since Aso has reportedly been hesitant to make any concessions on the economic front. The daily also speculated that Aso's recent controversial remarks on the Nazis may have prompted the U.S. not to welcome his trip.

In a related development, all Sunday papers wrote that Aso made derogatory remarks about people with mental disorders in a campaign speech he delivered in Ehime on Saturday. The politician later acknowledged that the comment was inappropriate.