



Morning Alert - Tuesday, January 2, 2018

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## HEADLINES

### Morning news

No newspapers were published today because of a press holiday. Top TV news items included anticipated traffic congestion today due to people returning home after the New Year's holidays, a deadly fire in Saitama, the apparent murder of an elderly couple in Ibaraki, and DPRK leader Kim Jong Un's New Year message warning the United States that his regime's nuclear capabilities are now complete and the nuclear launch button is always on his desk.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Hong Kong tanker seized by ROK in October for smuggling oil into DPRK

All Saturday papers took up a disclosure by the South Korean government that its naval authorities seized a Hong Kong-flagged tanker for exporting refined oil products to North Korea by transferring them to a DPRK vessel in international waters in the East China Sea on Oct. 19 in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The ship was chartered by a Taiwanese company that had notified the South Korean authorities ahead of the ship's departure from a South Korean port that its destination was Taiwan. The papers said North Korea has been desperate to smuggle on the high seas petroleum into the country, adding that the U.S., Japan, and South Korea are stepping up their surveillance in order to close loopholes in the UN economic sanctions against the Kim regime.

Yomiuri reported that Defense Secretary Mattis said on Friday: "Obviously if a government finds that there is a ship in their port conducting trade that was forbidden under the U.N. Security Council resolution, then they have an obligation and so far we have seen nations take that obligation seriously."

Sunday papers highlighted a Reuters' report alleging that several Russian tankers have engaged in similar smuggling operations involving the transport of oil to DPRK vessels in international waters near the Russian Far East. Monday's Yomiuri said a clandestine network of Chinese, Russian, and North Korean companies was formed in June 2017 for conducting illicit oil shipments to North Korea, with Chinese firms working as intermediaries between their Russian and DPRK partners to arrange tanker shipments and payment.

### **Secretary Mattis indicates U.S. flexibility on timing of joint training with South Korea**

Sunday's Yomiuri reported on remarks made to the press by Defense Secretary Mattis on Friday, in which he noted that the U.S. is not planning to cancel the annual joint training with the ROK that is customarily held in South Korea in February, but is willing to make adjustments to the timing of the drills. The daily explained that the South Korean government has requested that this year's exercises be postponed to avoid triggering negative reactions from North Korea in order to ensure the success of the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in February.

### **DPRK leader orders preparations for rocket launch to put satellite into space**

Sunday's Asahi claimed that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un instructed the nation's defense and science authorities in mid-December to start making preparations to fire a long-range rocket to put a satellite into space, speculating that the launch will take place on Sept. 9 to mark the 70th anniversary of the country's foundation. According to the paper, the planned launch is to test reentry technology or to put a satellite into orbit to guide and monitor ballistic missiles.

### **DPRK defector says Kim Jong Un would return Japanese abductees in exchange for money**

Monday's Mainichi led with an interview with Thae Yong Ho, the highest-level North Korean official to have defected when he sought asylum in 2016 in London where he was a minister-counsellor. The former DPRK diplomat claimed that Pyongyang is hoping to receive a massive amount of financial assistance from Japan in return for the settlement of the abduction issue by saying: "Kim Jong Un will not try to resolve the issue unless Japan clearly offers a bag full of cash.... He is hoping to inject Japanese money into the North Korean economy."

### **Five comfort women foundation directors to quit**

All Sunday papers reported that five of the eight directors of South Korea's Reconciliation and Healing Foundation for the comfort women have submitted their resignations following an ROK government panel's release last week of the results of its probe into the process leading to the conclusion of the 2015 comfort women agreement with Japan. The papers said if their resignations are accepted, the organization will probably cease to operate. They said this would deal a blow to the implementation of the comfort women pact.

### **ROK foreign minister speaks by phone with Secretary Tillerson**

Most Saturday papers reported that South Korean Foreign Minister Kang spoke by phone with Secretary of State Tillerson on Friday and explained that the Moon administration is committed to moving forward steadily with cooperation with Japan on the security and economic fronts irrespective of history-related disputes such as the comfort women. During the teleconference, the Secretary reportedly underscored the importance of trilateral partnership in resolving the North Korean nuclear and missile issue. Asahi speculated that Washington is concerned that relations between its two East Asian allies may deteriorate due to President Moon's negative assessment of the 2015 comfort women accord.

### **Japan plans to beef up economic cooperation with China**

Sunday's Nikkei led with a report on the Abe administration's plan to enhance economic partnership with China by financing environmental and energy conservation projects sought by Chinese enterprises as part of President Xi's "One Belt, One Road" trans-continental trade promotion initiative. The daily said Tokyo is keen to improve ties with Beijing quickly to ensure regional stability, adding that if the top Chinese politician visits Japan this year, Prime Minister Abe is hoping to issue a joint document with him stating their commitment to expediting mutual reconciliation.

Yomiuri published a similar article on the same day, saying that the GOJ plans to ask China to forge partnerships for four infrastructure projects that Japan plans to work on in Africa, including road and bridge construction in Kenya, so as to display that Tokyo is willing to take a concerted approach with Beijing's "One-Belt, One Road" initiative in order to elicit China's cooperation in reining in North Korea's nuclear and missile development.

### **Japan proposes trilateral summit with China, South Korea in Tokyo in April**

All Saturday papers highlighted the disclosure by several GOJ sources that the GOJ has proposed to the Chinese and South Korean governments the idea of hosting a trilateral summit in Tokyo on April 4-6 or April 9-11. The papers said Foreign Minister Kono is hoping to finalize the schedule when he visits China in late January.

### **China hoping to have four aircraft carriers in operation by 2030**

Monday's Sankei gave top coverage to the disclosure by a Chinese military source that the PLA Navy is aiming to have four aircraft carrier strike groups in operation by 2030 by expediting the construction of aircraft carriers, two of which might be nuclear-powered. Projecting that most of the envisaged carrier strike groups will be assigned to the South Sea Fleet that covers the South China Sea, the daily said that the deployment of four aircraft carriers by the Chinese could upset the military balance in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Vice foreign ministers of Japan, Russia to hold meeting on Northern Territories**

Monday's Nikkei wrote that arrangements are being made between Japan and Russia for their vice foreign ministers to hold a meeting in Tokyo this month. The Japanese side is reportedly hoping to

finalize the details of specific projects for joint economic activities on the Northern Territories so that Prime Minister Abe can reach a formal agreement with President Putin when they hold a summit in Russia in May.

### **Japan loses seat on UN Security Council**

Sunday's Sankei said Japan's non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council expired on Dec. 31, noting that the Japanese diplomats assigned to the UN mission have been praised by their foreign colleagues for their contributions to the solid and transparent management of the council. While noting that Japan has enhanced coordination with the U.S. and other partners to adopt several sanctions resolutions against North Korea, the daily said the GOJ is hoping to obtain a seat on the powerful body again in 2022.

## **SECURITY**

### **Japan considering procurement of additional F-35s**

Sunday's Mainichi claimed that the Defense Ministry is looking into procuring dozens of additional F-35s so as to deflect U.S. pressure to correct the bilateral trade imbalance. Noting that the GOJ has already committed to buying a total of 42 F-35As for the ASDF to replace the aging F-4s, the paper said the ministry is now hoping to purchase more F-35s to replace the F-15s. Some of the additional stealth fighters will probably be the F-35B, the Marine variant of the F-35, so that they can be operated on the amphibious assault ships that the MSDF plans to procure for remote island defense.

In a related story, Monday's Nikkei wrote that the GOJ is mulling the idea of procuring an airborne electronic attack (AEA) platform to disrupt and neutralize enemy-operated telecommunication networks and radar facilities, saying that the Boeing EA-18 is a primary candidate. Noting that the GOJ may choose to include the procurement of an AEA platform in the Medium-Term Defense Program when it is updated a year from now, the article said the Defense Ministry is aiming to purchase several such aircraft. The daily wrote in a separate piece that the proposed procurement of an AEA platform is the latest example of Japan's desire to possess defense hardware that can be potentially used for "offensive purposes," along with F-35Bs, cruise missiles, and the proposed conversion of the MSDF Izumo into an aircraft carrier. The paper expressed concern about the nation's exclusively defense-oriented policy being undermined as a result.

### **Suga visits Okinawa to campaign for pro-FRF candidate**

All Saturday papers wrote that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga visited Nago City, Okinawa, on Friday to campaign for a local LDP politician who plans to run in the mayoral election in February to unseat incumbent Mayor Inamine, a staunch opponent of the FRF construction plan off Camp Schwab. The senior Abe administration official briefed local officials on the central government's initiatives for revitalizing the local economy, some of which will be undertaken without the involvement of the prefectural government led by Governor Onaga, who is also opposed to the Futenma relocation

project. The GOJ official also emphasized Tokyo's strong commitment to reducing the security burden on Okinawa. The papers said Suga is extremely anxious to unseat Inamine so as to move forward with the FRF initiative, adding that the governor and other local politicians critical of the relocation project convened an emergency meeting in Nago on the same day to support Inamine's reelection bid.

### **Rally held in Okinawa to protest fallen window incident**

Saturday's Asahi carried a prominent inside-page article on a rally held in Ginowan, Okinawa, on Friday to protest the recent incident in which a window fell from a Futenma-based helicopter onto a local school playground. According to the organizer, some 600 people, including mothers with small children, took part in the event and urged the U.S. military not to operate flights over schools and other educational institutions in the vicinity of Futenma.

## **POLITICS**

### **LDP mulls defining SDF as “organization with force” in revised Constitution**

Saturday's Mainichi gave top play to a report saying that the ruling LDP's taskforce on constitutional revision is considering adding to the Constitution a clause specifying that the SDF constitutes an “organization with the minimum necessary level of force” in an attempt to distinguish it from the “war potential” that Japan is prohibited from possessing under Article 9. The move comes in response to Prime Minister Abe's insistence on adding to the Constitution a provision making the existence of the SDF explicit while concurrently retaining the second paragraph of Article 9 that bans possession of “any war potential.” It is also aimed at quelling persistent calls within the LDP for completely deleting the second paragraph. The daily said even if this idea is adopted and endorsed by the parliament and the public in a national referendum, apprehension will remain that the scope of the definition may be expanded at the government's discretion.

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