



Afternoon Alert - Wednesday, March 22, 2017

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INTERNATIONAL

FBI probe into Trump administration's possible "collusion" with Russia to affect Japanese diplomacy

On TV-Asahi's nightly news program "Hodo Station," former Kyodo News Managing Editor Goto claimed that the ongoing investigation into possible collusion between the Russian government and the Trump campaign during the U.S. presidential election that was formally acknowledged by FBI Director Comey on Monday may impact Prime Minister Abe's diplomatic efforts. The journalist speculated that since President Trump will probably no longer be able to take a soft line toward President Putin, who had been hoping the U.S. leader would exercise leadership in lifting or relaxing G7 sanctions on Moscow during the G7 summit to be held in Italy in late May, the Russian leader may instead expect Abe to take the initiative in forging G7 consensus for adopting a more conciliatory approach toward Moscow. Because the Japanese leader is expected to visit Russia in late April, Goto speculated that President Putin may put forward "intriguing" ideas on the territorial dispute that could prompt Abe to propose easing the hard line toward the Putin administration at the G7 summit.

DPRK conducts unsuccessful missile launch

Broadcasters and national papers reported on an announcement by the South Korean Defense Ministry earlier today that North Korea launched a missile from the eastern part of the country this morning, but it apparently exploded in midair. The ROK military is currently analyzing the situation to identify what type of projectile was fired. According to NHK, the U.S. Pacific Command also made an announcement on the failed launch, noting that the missile appears to have exploded several seconds after it was launched. An unnamed State Department official condemned the Kim regime's

latest attempt to launch a missile and said, “We urge North Korea to halt provocations that undermine peace and stability in the region.”

Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga told reporters that there was no indication that a DPRK missile flew toward Japan. He said: “We don’t think that a situation has emerged in which our nation’s security is directly affected.... We are collecting and analyzing intelligence. However, we will not release detailed information given the nature of the situation. Protecting the lives and property of the Japanese people is the government’s foremost responsibility. We are fulfilling this responsibility with respect to North Korea and maintaining a high-level surveillance system.”

Tillerson breaks “silence,” but diplomatic influence remains weak

Sankei published a column by senior writer Yuasa concerning the recent East Asian trip by Secretary of State Tillerson, during which he surprised the press corps by suddenly becoming “outspoken” in highlighting the Trump administration’s inclination to take a tough line toward North Korea. The writer explained that Secretary Tillerson had avoided engaging with the media since taking office in late January. While welcoming the Secretary’s statements on the “failure of strategic patience” and a possible military option to halt Pyongyang’s pursuit of nuclear and missile capabilities, the writer claimed that a successful U.S. military operation on the Korean Peninsula would require close coordination with allies and government-wide unity. The reporter claimed that such unity currently does not exist within the Trump administration because Chief Strategist Bannon and other White House “ideologues” wield strong clout that overshadows the State Department. The journalist expressed concern that China may outsmart the U.S. on the international economic and diplomatic fronts unless such “internationalists” as Secretary Tillerson, Vice President Pence, and Defense Secretary Mattis seize the diplomatic initiative.

- [Gist of Japan-France summit talks](#) (Yomiuri Evening edition)
- [Interview with South Korean Ambassador to Japan Lee Joon-gyu](#) (Tokyo Shimbun)
- [Editorial: Nations must pressure U.S. on need for close cooperation](#) (Asahi)
- [Ambassador Harada to leave MOFA](#) (Mainichi)

SECURITY

Okinawa chief to attend protest rally at Camp Schwab

Okinawa Times claimed in a front-page story that Okinawa Governor Onaga has informally decided to take part in a rally in protest of the FRF construction to be held in front of Camp Schwab this Saturday with the goal of highlighting his “solidarity” with base opponents and local residents. This will be the first time for him to attend this type of event in the Henoko district. Given that the governor

has not been able to come up with concrete measures to stop the ongoing sea-based construction work, the paper said Onaga is hopeful that his participation will help reignite momentum against Futenma relocation. .

Congress studying Marine force realignment plan in Asia-Pacific

Okinawa Times reported from Washington on a finding that the Senate Appropriations Committee asked the U.S. Government Accountability Office in April 2016 to examine the USMC's plan to restructure force deployment in the Asia-Pacific region. According to the article, out of concern that the delayed FRF construction off Camp Schwab could complicate the overall Marine realignment initiative in the region, the congressional panel separately recommended that the Pentagon consider such options as the continued use of MCAS Futenma and the temporary transfer of the Futenma functions to Kadena AB. While explaining that this recommendation was not meant to express objection to the FRF construction, an unnamed influential member of the committee emphasized the importance of implementing the force realignment plan in order to respond to China's militarization of the South China Sea.

Misawa mayor expresses agreement with ASDF deployment of Global Hawk

NHK's Aomori station reported that during a news conference on Tuesday, Mayor Taneichi of Misawa in Aomori Prefecture commented on the Defense Ministry's plan to deploy three Global Hawk unmanned surveillance aircraft to the ASDF's Misawa Air Base starting at the end of fiscal 2019. The mayor stated that he has no choice but to express understanding for the deployment plan in view of the security environment surrounding Japan that is becoming increasingly tense. The mayor plans to call on the Defense Ministry to take sufficient safety measures when he conveys his agreement to the ministry on Wednesday or later.

- [Four Korean nationals arrested during Okinawa base protests](#) (Sankei)

ECONOMY

Banks willing to offer Westinghouse \$500 million in temporary loans

Today's Sankei printed a Kyodo piece from New York on a Reuters story claiming that Westinghouse is taking offers for a financing package worth over \$500 million to help it go through bankruptcy in the U.S. The nuclear power plant developer's parent firm Toshiba is currently reviewing proposals from financial institutions and investment firms about a so-called debtor-in-possession loan, which would carry Westinghouse through a potential bankruptcy by allowing it to continue to pay employees and build four nuclear power plants in Georgia and South Carolina.

Sankei said the proposals, apparently resulting from the judgment by Toshiba and its lenders that Westinghouse bankruptcy cannot be avoided, may allow Toshiba to quicken internal and external

coordination with the GOJ and the USG for assisting Westinghouse in filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

- [Koizumi urges JA to support farmers obtain certification](#) (Mainichi)
- [Overtime caps to also cover construction, transport workers](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Flawed move to curb overtime, prevent death from overwork](#) (Asahi)
- [Former USTR says Japan should lead efforts to stem protectionism](#) (Nikkei)
- [BoJ holds almost 500 trillion yen in government bonds](#) (Asahi)

POLITICS

- [Prime minister's schedule on March 20-21](#) (Nikkei)
- [Defense Minister Inada in deep trouble despite expectations for her as nation's next leader](#) (Sankei Online)
- [Editorial: 'Repackaged' anti-conspiracy bill raises too many questions](#) (Asahi)
- [Survey of newspaper editorials on top court's ruling about GPS investigation](#) (Sankei)
- [Punishable and unpunishable crimes under Japan's anti-terrorism bill](#) (Mainichi)

OPINION POLLS

- [Cabinet support rate declines slightly to 51.3%, Jiji Press poll](#) (Jiji)
- [Cabinet support drops slightly to 57%, Sankei-FNN poll](#) (Sankei)
- [Ruling parties feel sense of crisis over decline in cabinet support rate](#) (Yomiuri)
- [With "Moritomo" scandal, gov't approval dips, public opinion polls](#) (Mainichi)
- [Drop in cabinet support rate "within scope expected," senior LDP official](#) (Yomiuri)

SOCIETY

U.S. Embassy producing video to support Kumamoto's reconstruction

TBS and Sankei reported online that the U.S. Embassy is currently producing a video in support of Kumamoto's efforts to rebuild the local communities devastated by the strong earthquakes a year ago, saying that Embassy mascot "Tom" joined the famous Kumamoto character "Kumamon" and some 350 local residents at Kumamoto Castle on Tuesday to perform the "Kumamon Dance." The film will be posted on YouTube and other U.S. Embassy social media platforms in early April. U.S. Consulate Fukuoka Principal Officer Joy Sakurai reportedly said: "We want to convey the message that America will continue to support Kumamoto. We hope this video will help with reconstruction and tourism promotion."

- [23% seriously considered committing suicide](#) (The Japan News)
 - [22,000 transgender patients visited medical facilities in 2015: study](#) (Kyodo News)
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