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[Regional Overview: Rebalance Continues Despite Distractions](#) by Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman

It was a rough four months for the US as Washington struggled to convince Asian audiences that the “rebalance” is sustainable given renewed attention to the Middle East, even before the Syrian crises. US engagement in Asia was multidimensional with participation at several ministerial-level meetings, a visit by Vice President Biden, continued pursuit of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and a show of military capability in Korea. But, it isn’t clear North Korea got the message. Kim Jong Un seems to have adopted his father’s play book: first create a crisis, make lots of threats, and follow up with a “smile diplomacy” campaign. So far, Washington has stuck to its game plan, insisting on a sign of genuine sincerity before opening a dialogue with Pyongyang. Finally, the US image in the region was damaged by revelations about classified NSA intelligence collection efforts.

[US-Japan Relations: Abe Settles In](#) by Michael J. Green and Nicholas Szechenyi

Prime Minister Abe focused intently on economic policy and led his Liberal Democratic Party to a resounding victory in the July Upper House election, securing full control of the Diet and a period of political stability that bodes well for his policy agenda. Multilateral gatherings in Asia yielded several opportunities for bilateral and trilateral consultations on security issues, and the economic pillar of the alliance also took shape with Japan’s entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations and discussions on energy cooperation. Comments on sensitive history issues sparked controversy but did not derail bilateral diplomacy. The nomination of Caroline Kennedy as US ambassador to Japan marks a new chapter in the relationship.

[US-China Relations: Sizing Each Other Up at Sunnyslans](#) by Bonnie Glaser and Jacqueline Vitello

With their domestic challenges in mind and a shared need for a stable bilateral relationship, Presidents Barack Obama and Xi Jinping met for a day and a half “no necktie” official working meeting to discuss the panoply of bilateral, regional, and global issues that affect US and Chinese interests. The fifth annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) was held in Washington on July 10-11, along with the Strategic Security Dialogue (SSD) and the first Cyber Working Group. Cyber security, especially cyber theft, was a prominent and contentious issue, aggravated by the revelations of former NSA contractor Edward Snowden. Maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas were also a source of tension. The bilateral military relationship was a bright spot, with the visit to the US of Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan.

[US-Korea Relations: A Good Start](#) by Victor Cha and Ellen Kim

The highlight of US-ROK relations was the first summit between Barack Obama and Park Geun-hye in Washington where the two presidents celebrated the 60th birthday of the alliance. Obama announced his support for Park’s “trustpolitik” initiative, demonstrating bilateral agreement on policies toward North Korea. The US also voiced support for the thaw in inter-Korean relations reflected in resumption of dialogue over the Kaesong Industrial Complex. Meanwhile, South Korea and the US agreed to an extension of the US-ROK civil nuclear agreement, began negotiations on a Special Measures Agreement (host nation support for US forces), and restarted discussions on a possible delay of OPCON transfer.

[US-Southeast Asia Relations: Philippines – an Exemplar of US Rebalance](#) by Sheldon Simon

The Philippines has linked its military modernization and overall external defense to the US rebalance. Washington has raised its annual military assistance by two-thirds to \$50 million and is providing surplus military equipment. To further cement the relationship, Philippine and US defense officials announced that the two countries would negotiate a new “framework agreement” under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty providing for greater access by US forces to Philippine bases. Washington is also stepping up participation in ASEAN-based security organizations, sending forces in June to an 18-nation exercise in Brunei. A visit to Washington by Vietnam’s President Truong Tan Sang resulted in a US-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership. Myanmar’s president also came to Washington, the first visit by the country’s head of state since 1966. An economic agreement was the chief deliverable. While President Obama praised Myanmar’s democratic progress, he also expressed concern about increased sectarian violence.

[China-Southeast Asia Relations: China’s Toughness on the South China Sea – Year II](#) by Robert Sutter and Chin-Hao Huang

China’s tough stand on maritime territorial disputes evident first in 2012 confrontations with the Philippines in the South China Sea and Japan in the East China Sea has endured into 2013. Leaders’ statements, supporting commentary, military and paramilitary activity, economic developments, and administrative advances all point to determined support of an important shift in China’s foreign policy with serious implications for China’s neighbors and concerned powers. China’s success in advancing its control of disputed areas in the South China Sea and its overall assertiveness in support of broad territorial claims along its maritime rim head the list of reasons why the new policy is likely to continue and intensify. Few governments are prepared to resist.

[China-Taiwan Relations: Bumps along the Road](#) by David G. Brown and Kevin Scott

The slow steady improvement of cross-strait relations hit some not unexpected bumps in recent months. Domestic politics in Taiwan, particularly partisan actions by the opposition DPP, have delayed Legislative Yuan action on important cross-strait matters. Despite these domestic troubles, Beijing is maintaining a steady course and seems confident about the long-term direction of President Ma's policy. Track II political dialogues are growing, including those involving the DPP, which launched a series of meetings on its policy toward Beijing. Taiwan has been invited to attend the triennial Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) as a special guest of the ICAO Council.

[North Korea-South Korea Relations: Second Chance for Trustpolitik?](#) by Aidan Foster-Carter

This has been an interesting four months. Pyongyang abruptly changed its tune, demanding the immediate reopening of the Kaesong Industrial Complex no less peremptorily than it had earlier closed it. Both attitudes were exasperating and hard to explain, but at least the North's new "peace offensive" offers some hope of a more constructive approach. This also challenged the South, forcing it to put flesh on the bones of President Park's "trustpolitik" and make hard decisions on two levels: what principles to adopt in dealing with a now partly more pliant North and – on that basis – how to respond on a whole range of immediate concrete issues. This was a steep learning curve, which the new ROK administration mostly handled with a skillful mix of firmness and flexibility – except for one mistaken and avoidable row over protocol, which delayed the rapprochement by a month or so.

[China-Korea Relations: How Does China Solve a Problem Like North Korea?](#) by Scott Snyder and See-won Byun

China-Korea relations entered an active phase of leadership exchanges following North Korea's satellite launch, its nuclear test, and the passage of UN Security Council resolutions condemning these actions. Although the aftermath drove continued debate on the extent of Chinese leverage and patience with Pyongyang, Beijing has reaffirmed its commitment to bring North Korea back to multilateral talks through revived bilateral exchanges with Pyongyang. Beijing's frustration with its North Korean ally has expanded Chinese willingness to include denuclearization as a policy objective it shares with the US and South Korea, but differences remain regarding long-term strategic interests and the preferred tools for pursuing the objective.

[Japan-China Relations: Going Nowhere Slowly](#) by James J. Przystup

Repeated efforts by the Abe government to engage China in high-level dialogue failed to produce a summit meeting. While Tokyo remained firm in its position on the Senkakus, namely that there is no territorial issue that needs to be resolved, Beijing remained equally firm in its position that Japan acknowledge the existence of a dispute as a precondition for talks. In the meantime, Chinese and Japanese patrol ships were in almost daily contact in the

Senkaku/Diaoyu region, while issues related to history, Japan's evolving security policy, Okinawa, and the East China Sea continued to roil the relationship. By mid-summer over 90 percent of Japanese and Chinese respondents to a joint public opinion poll held negative views of each other.

[Japan-Korea Relations: No Signs of Improvement over the Summer](#) by David Kang and Jiun Bang

South Korea-Japan relations have been frozen for some time and despite the summer heat, no thaw appears likely anytime soon. Although economic interactions continue to deepen between the two countries, and although there is a clear desire – and even a need – to coordinate policies toward North Korea and China, the two countries appear more focused on other issues as their main foreign policy priorities in the short-term. The two recently elected leaders have yet to meet for a summit, a sign that even a symbolic attempt to repair relations is proving difficult. Japanese Prime Minister Abe has grown stronger with a rousing Liberal Democratic Party victory in Upper House elections, yet a number of rhetorical controversies kept attention focused on Abe's foreign policy, particularly toward Korea and China. To date not much has changed and there is little evidence that either Seoul or Tokyo desires improved relations.

[China-Russia Relations: Summer Heat and Sino-Russian Strategizing](#) by Yu Bin

The Sino-Russian strategic partnership was in overdrive during the summer months despite the unbearable, record-setting heat in China and Russia. While the Snowden asylum issue dragged on, "Operation Tomahawk" against Syria appeared to be in countdown mode by late August. In between, the Russian and Chinese militaries conducted two large exercises, which were described as "not targeted against any third party," a term often used by the US and its allies to describe their exercises. Welcome to the age of speaking softly with or without a big stick.

[Australia – East Asia/US Relations: Election plus Marines, Joint Facilities and the Asian Century](#) by Graeme Dobell

The past year saw the unfolding of the withdrawal timetable from Afghanistan, the second rotation of US Marines to northern Australia, the first "Full Knowledge and Concurrence" statement on US facilities on Australian soil in six years, and the end of Australia's long-term military deployments in Timor Leste and Solomon Islands. The Gillard government produced a trio of major policy statements built on an understanding that Asia's "extraordinary ascent" means Australia is entering "a truly transformative period in our history." Meanwhile, Australian politics experienced a bit of turmoil. With the Labor Parliamentary Caucus in disarray, the Liberal-National Coalition led by Tony Abbot won the national election in early September. In the end, not being Julia Gillard or Kevin Rudd was enough for an Abbott triumph.