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Regional Overview: Aggressive Diplomacy with Mixed Results by Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman

President Obama's "reassurance" tour to Asia was well-received by all his hosts but drew mixed reviews from pundits and from Beijing. His accomplishments were partly overshadowed by two tragedies – the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 and the sinking of a South Korean ferry – and by lack of progress on the Trans-Pacific Partnership while abroad or on Trade Promotion Authority at home. Obama also tried peacemaking by bringing Japan's Prime Minister Abe and South Korean President Park together for their first meeting, on the sidelines of the third Nuclear Security Summit. Secretaries Kerry and Hagel also toured the region with Hagel stopping in Honolulu to host the first US-ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting. Pressure on Pyongyang to denuclearize has yielded little, other than threats of another nuclear test and incredibly vile personal attacks on Presidents Park and Obama. Australian Prime Minister Abbott made a successful swing through Northeast Asia, while participants at the Western Pacific Naval Symposium agreed to a set of rules to prevent encounters at sea.

US-Japan Relations: The Sushi Summit by Michael J. Green and Nicholas Szechenyi

The Abe government focused on the economy, energy strategy, and defense policy reform but the timeline for implementing these pillars of Abe's agenda was uncertain. A flurry of bilateral diplomacy paved the way for several initiatives including a trilateral summit with South Korean President Park Geun-hye and President Obama in The Hague. Obama made a state visit to Japan highlighting areas for strategic cooperation between Japan and the United States but the two governments were not able to conclude a bilateral trade agreement that would strengthen the economic pillar of the alliance.

US-China Relations: China's Maritime Disputes Top the Agenda by Bonnie Glaser and Jacqueline Vitello

The complexity of the US-China relationship was in sharp relief in the first four months of 2014. Differences over maritime disputes along China's eastern periphery were at the top of the agenda. Russia's seizure of Crimea introduced a new point of contention. Despite much diplomatic activity, little progress was made on seeking denuclearization of North Korea. US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel made a fruitful visit to China that included very sharp exchanges with his Chinese counterparts and a tour of China's aircraft carrier. Michelle Obama along with her children and mother toured China promoting education and people-to-people exchanges. The full range of issues in the bilateral relationship was

discussed by Presidents Obama and Xi Jinping when they met on the margins of the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague.

US-Korea Relations: Strengthened Resolve as North Korea Rumbles by Stephen Noerper

The highlight in US-Korea relations was President Barack Obama's visit to Seoul in April. The visit came at an uncertain time in Korea: South Korea was in the troughs of a national tragedy with a ferry sinking, North Korea threatened a "new form of nuclear test," and regional tensions remained high amidst territorial and historical disputes. During his visit to Seoul, Obama offered sympathies to the families of the victims of the ferry disaster and assurances with Park on North Korean rumblings. Meanwhile, North Korea returned to a pattern of bellicose spring rhetoric for the second year under Kim Jong Un, ostensibly as a counter to US-ROK military exercises. This escalation in belligerence seemingly negated earlier diplomatic overtures.

US-Southeast Asia Relations: A Strong Start to the New Year by Catharin Dalpino

The US raised its profile in Southeast Asia with a series of high-profile visits and events in early 2014. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Indonesia, delivering a speech on climate change, and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel hosted a US-ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting in Hawaii. President Obama visited Malaysia and the Philippines, stops he had cancelled last fall because of the US government shutdown. The trip shored up the administration's assertion that the US "rebalancing" to Asia is real and that Southeast Asia is critical to that process. However, the heavy emphasis on defense also reinforced perceptions that the "pivot" is primarily a security policy. Relations between Washington and Nay Pyi Taw are slowing over continued violence in Rakhine State.

China-Southeast Asia Relations: South China Sea Advances Meet US-led Opposition by Robert Sutter and Chin-Hao Huang

Chinese efforts to shift the emphasis toward positive economic and diplomatic initiatives and to play down South China Sea territorial disputes foundered in early 2014. Beijing's assertiveness and advances involving fishing regulations, air defense rights, and maritime activities based on China's vague and broad territorial claims received repeated, strong US executive branch criticism and firmer opposition in Congress. The US was joined by Japan, the Philippines, and Australia. Chinese media noted President Obama's effort to sidestep direct criticism of China during stops in Malaysia and the Philippines in his April visit to Asia, though the Philippine-US Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement was widely criticized. While Southeast Asian media also registered concerns with Chinese assertiveness, most governments tended to avoid criticism. Nevertheless,

Malaysia and Indonesia voiced concern about China's broad territorial ambitions.

[China-Taiwan Relations: A Breakthrough and a Deadlock](#)

by David G. Brown and Kevin Scott

In February, officials from Beijing and Taiwan met publicly in their official capacities for the first time since 1949. Both sides characterized this breakthrough as a step forward in cross-strait relations. However in Taipei, partisan maneuvering in committee and an unprecedented occupation of the Legislative Yuan by students created a deadlock blocking approval of the Cross-Straits Service Trade Agreement concluded last June. While Beijing and Taipei have tried to maintain progress, these domestic developments in Taiwan represent a serious challenge both for President Ma and Beijing.

[North Korea-South Korea Relations: Sound and Fury](#)

by Aidan Foster-Carter

The first third of 2014 was a peculiar time for inter-Korean relations. In the past, months could go by when nothing much happened between the two Koreas. This was not like that as these four months were eventful, but also frustrating. Much was said and done, yet nothing lasting was achieved – except for a single round of family reunions. As of now, inter-Korean ties appear to be going backward and are mired in recrimination, with the North plumbing new depths of foul language and personal insult toward President Park Geun-hye. This reflects frustration in Pyongyang as to what Park really stands for or hopes to accomplish on the North-South front. Her signals in this area are more than a little mixed, but then Kim Jong Un is even harder to read in terms of policy and strategy.

[China-Korea Relations: China's Red Line on the Korean Peninsula](#)

by Scott Snyder and See-won Byun

In early January, ROK President Park said relations with China had reached an historic high point, but North Korean belligerence posed a challenge to implementation of the China-ROK Joint Statement. Despite increased tensions on the peninsula, China and the ROK have continued to build on their cooperative strategic partnership. President Xi Jinping and Park met on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit and talked by telephone a month later. Premiers Li Keqiang and Jung Hong-won met on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia, while Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Yun Byung-se held periodic telephone talks. In contrast, China-DPRK contacts have been limited to low-level visits and routine exchanges. The highest level meeting was between President Xi and Kim Yong Nam on the sidelines of the Sochi Winter Olympics. China's engagement with the DPRK has focused primarily on mediating the resumption of the Six-Party Talks.

[Japan-China Relations: Past as Prologue](#)

History dominated the Japan-China relationship. Controversies over the Yasukuni Shrine, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, Ahn Jung-geun, the Kono and Murayama Statements, Nanjing, compensation for wartime forced labor, and China's seizure of a Mitsui ship over a wartime-related contract dispute marked the first four months, ending almost where the year began with Prime Minister Abe making an offering to the

Yasukuni Shrine during the spring festival. Meanwhile, Chinese Coast Guard ships operated on an almost daily basis in the Senkakus, occasionally entering Japanese territorial waters. In response, Japan increased the presence of the Self-Defense Forces in the southwest islands.

[Japan-Korea Relations: Is the US a "Wingman" or "Third Wheel"?](#)

by David Kang and Jiun Bang

For the last few years, it has been popular for Japan-Korea watchers to ask about the possibility of a "reset" in relations. The best time for this may be 2015, given that it marks the 70th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan and the 50th anniversary of the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan-Republic of Korea that normalized relations. As if to refute the idea that there might be any lull before a storm, Tokyo and Seoul rang in the New Year not with bells and whistles but a promotional video for Korea's claim to Dokdo/Takeshima that went viral on *YouTube*. This may have set the tone for the months that followed. A major theme for the early months of 2014 was the role of the US – both as a setting and an actor – in issues ranging from the naming of the East Sea/Sea of Japan to getting the two heads of state in the same room.

[China-Russia Relations: "Western Civil War" Déjà Vu?](#)

by Yu Bin

The Sochi Olympics and the Ukraine crisis tested the upper and lower limits of the China-Russia strategic partnership in early 2014. While the Olympics infused new dynamics into the relationship, the turmoil in Ukraine is still escalating. Despite Kiev's "anti-terror" operations in Ukraine's east and southeast, pro-Russian militants are now controlling 23 cities – and counting – in Ukraine's industrial heartland. For China, there is little space to navigate between Russia, the EU, and Ukraine. Welcome to the brave new world of Beijing's neutrality with Chinese characteristics.

[India-East Asia Relations: Rebalancing Indian Style](#)

by Satu Limaye

India-East Asia relations since the beginning of 2013 are a model of "low drama." India has managed to move forward its relations using a mix of tools including government policy, the private sector, and broader societal links. India has been diplomatically, economically, and to some extent militarily rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific for about 20 years; a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and "Eastern bloc," the economic dynamism of East Asia, and India's own "Look East" policies combined with some Asian countries reciprocal efforts to expand the role of "external" powers in the region. A careful analysis of India-East Asia ties suggests how much progress has been made and how much potential remains. Closing this gap will be the story of India-East Asia relations for decades. But as tensions rise in Asia and countries jostle for economic growth, diplomatic space, and security reassurances, it seems a safe bet that India will continue to be an element, and possibly an increasingly important element, of the strategic picture.