



The latest issue of *Comparative Connections*, a quarterly electronic journal on East Asian bilateral relations, is now available at <http://www.csis.org/pacfor/ccejournal.html>. Below you will find brief article summaries.

**Regional Overview: Autopilot Is Not Good Enough!**  
by Ralph A. Cossa

There is a natural inclination in Washington during a presidential election year to want to put Asia policy on autopilot. Some disturbing trends argue against a policy of benign neglect, however. Concerns about U.S. unilateralism continue to be raised in Asia. Apprehensions about significant shifts in American foreign policy also appear to be rising due to uncertainty about the views of both presumed presidential candidates. Added to this is the impending transfer of power in Taiwan and its implications for regional security. Meanwhile, ASEAN's growing disunity is ringing alarm bells, as are concerns about the unintended consequences of President Clinton's visit to India and Pakistan. There are, of course, countervailing positive trends and the negative ones are for the most part manageable. But they will require careful attention; autopilot is just not good enough.

**U.S.-Japan: The Security Treaty at 40 – Strong but with Complaints about Back Pain** by Michael Jonathan Green

The U.S.-Japan relationship turned 40 in January amid calls for more ownership of the alliance for Japan. U.S. frustration with Japan also grew as collisions over host nation support and a number of minor irritants, such as trash burning near a U.S. base, implementation of the Defense Guidelines, and air traffic control over Okinawa, impeded forward progress. In addition, Liberal Democratic Party support of economic reform is dwindling, and causing some consternation in Washington. Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi's incapacitation in the beginning of April and the subsequent election of Yoshiro Mori will not change the basic direction of the alliance, but could complicate the political environment.

**U.S.-China: Taiwan Tops the Bilateral Agenda**  
by Bonnie S. Glaser

The year 2000 opened with a flurry of contacts between American and Chinese officials. The bilateral military relationship, suspended since the U.S. accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, resumed and an agenda for dialogue and exchanges between the two militaries was set in motion. A senior delegation of military and civilian American officials visited Beijing as efforts continued to get Sino-U.S. relations back on track and re-engaged in discussions of security issues of common concern. The election of the Democratic Progressive Party candidate Chen Shui-bian as president of Taiwan caught both the U.S. and China by surprise and prompted Washington to send envoys to both sides of the Strait to urge caution and restraint. In the U.S.,

the Clinton administration embarked on a major campaign to win approval from Congress for Permanent Normal Trade Relations status for China

**U.S.- Korea: Staying on Course through Election Campaigns** by David Brown

Washington and Seoul have been preoccupied with election campaigns during the past three months. Their policies toward North Korea, although controversial, have not been significant issues in either the National Assembly election in Korea or the presidential primaries in the U.S., thanks primarily to the absence of provocative actions by Pyongyang. Close consultations at the official level have maintained the compatibility of the policies each administration continues to pursue with Pyongyang, which has focused much of its attention this quarter on diplomatic initiatives toward Japan, China, Italy, and others.

**U.S.-Russia: Putin's Russia** by Toby Trister Gati

For the first time in Russian history, supreme executive power has been peacefully transferred via national democratic elections. Vladimir Putin emerged as a president haunted by Russia's authoritarian past and galvanized by a rebounding economy and a re-invigorated government. Putin's attempts to reach out to the West demonstrate that he is seeking friendlier ties. However, Russia's actions in Chechnya continue to be a stumbling block. Putin's ability to make some painful political and economic adjustments will dictate whether Russia takes a step forward or back. Despite the best of intentions, it will not be easy to develop a new understanding between the U.S. and Russia on where we go from here.

**U.S.-ASEAN: Revitalizing Military Ties, the Cambodian Tribunal, and Problems with UNCTAD** by Sheldon Simon

The United States revitalized military ties with the Philippines in the "Balikatan" joint exercise, the first major military exercise between these armed forces since 1995. Defense Secretary Cohen visited Vietnam to establish limited military ties. Washington also joined UN efforts to add international jurists to the Cambodian tribunal being created to try surviving Khmer Rouge leaders. Meanwhile, in Bangkok, the February meeting of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development revealed differences between developing and developed states over free trade, labor protection, and patent rights.

**China-ASEAN: Tensions Promote Discussions on a Code of Conduct** by Carlyle A. Thayer

China-ASEAN relations were almost wholly focused on territorial disputes this quarter. China's relations with the Philippines and Vietnam presented contrasting patterns. Encroachments by Chinese fishing vessels in the waters

around Scarborough Shoal became a constant irritant and led to the exchange of diplomatic protests between Manila and Beijing. At the same time, China reacted negatively to the revival of U.S.-Philippines joint military exercises. In contrast, China and Vietnam moved to capitalize on the signing of a Treaty on the Land Border by keeping the momentum of negotiations going, and used the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations to wax effusively about their “traditional friendly relations.”

#### **China-Taiwan: Cross-Strait Cross-Fire** by Gerrit W. Gong

Chen Shui-bian’s victory on March 18, 2000 to become Taiwan’s president-elect dramatically changes Taiwan’s domestic political topology and thereby the assumptions and framework for China-Taiwan cross-Strait relations. Chen’s victory also ended a fifty-year Kuomintang reign over Taiwan, placing the Democratic Progressive Party behind the wheel for the first time. The election also served to heighten cross-Strait tension. Prior to the election, China issued a White Paper on cross-Strait relations, taking a more aggressive rhetorical stance toward Taiwan. Since the election, Beijing seems to be taking a wait-and-see approach, but it is unclear just how long China will be content with simply watching events unfold.

#### **China-Korea: Upgrading Communication Channels, Messages Are Getting Clearer** by Scott Snyder

An unprecedented visit to Seoul by PRC Defense Minister Chi Haotian marked the completion of the first exchange of visits between top-level Chinese and South Korean defense officials. China also sent clear negative signals regarding the limits of its willingness to cooperate on the issue of North Korean refugees, repatriating seven refugees despite strong ROK protests. On the ROK side, the primary reason for upgrading the Sino-ROK relationship lies in the “China” fever gripping the South Korean Internet and telecommunications sectors. However, Chinese industrial pollution blowing over Korea emerged as a key international issue, drawing the attention of a trilateral (China-Japan-South Korea) meeting of Environment Ministers. To the North, DPRK President Kim Jong-il made an unprecedented visit to the PRC Embassy in Pyongyang, although it remains to be seen whether more direct channels between Beijing and Pyongyang will develop.

#### **Japan-China: No Escaping History – or the Future** by James Przystup

Japan’s relations with China began on a positive note, with the announcement of a FY 2000 budget request to provide for the clean-up of chemical weapons abandoned in China by the Imperial army. However, history soon proved to be very much alive as underscored by the Osaka conference on the Nanjing Massacre. Other developments this quarter, including cyber attacks on Japanese government home pages, (in part originating in China), the 15 percent increase in China’s military spending, and the Presidential election on Taiwan also posed new challenges. On the economic side, Toyota announced final approval of a joint venture, and Tokyo unveiled new Overseas Development Assistance commitments. At the same time, China’s Supreme Court acted to make claims by Japanese banks against China’s bankrupt

international trade and investment corporations virtually unrecoverable.

#### **Japan-Korea: The Pre-Game Continues...** by Victor D. Cha

The quarter was a relatively quiet one for Japan-ROK and Japan-DPRK relations. There is no denying important and requisite interim steps taken by Tokyo and Pyongyang in preliminary normalization talks. There is no denying modest but not immoderate steps by Seoul and Tokyo in cementing relations. Trilateral policy coordination with the United States also continued. But these developments are best seen as the “pre-game” for the next quarter when formal Japan-DPRK normalization talks commence, a high-level DPRK visit to Washington is imminent, a Japan-ROK summit is in the making, and a high-level inter-Korean meeting remains a possibility.

#### **Japan-Russia: Weathering War, Elections, and Yeltsin’s Resignation** by Joseph Ferguson

Tokyo has spent the first three months of the new millennium just trying to figure out Vladimir Putin. Tokyo has been sending strong signals to Russia and its new president, but the calls have remained unanswered. Moscow’s inattention further complicates relational inequities, as Japan continues to be the only nation extending bilateral credits to Russia. However, low-level public and private contacts flourished in the form of cultural exchange, legal cooperation, and business loans. Complicating this relationship is an awareness that Chinese and U.S. actions will play a heavy hand in negotiating Japan-Russia ties. Nonetheless, Japanese leaders are hopeful – if perhaps overoptimistic – that a strong Russian leader will be willing and able to “move the relationship forward” (i.e. make concessions to Japan).

#### **China -Russia: New Century, New Face, and China’s “Putin Puzzle”** by Yu Bin

The sudden changing of the guard in the Kremlin led to a cooling and holding phase for Russo-Chinese relations. Although minister-level contacts continued after Yeltsin’s grand exit from power and before Putin’s election as president, some reassessment of bilateral relations seemed to be in progress in the Kremlin. Putin’s cautiousness on a China policy, deliberate or not, was in sharp contrast to an unprecedented Russian “omnidirectional” foreign policy, demonstrated by Foreign Minister Ivanov’s travels in the region. The Putin puzzle seemed to worry China, which had every reason to press for stronger ties with Russia as relations with both Taiwan and the United States started to whither.

*To receive quarterly summaries of Comparative Connections electronically, please send an e-mail to [pfejournal@lava.net](mailto:pfejournal@lava.net)*