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Regional Overview: More of the Same . . . and Then Some!
by Ralph A. Cossa

More of the same! That appears to be the Asia policy theme for the second Bush administration. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reinforced the central themes of her predecessor: the centrality of the U.S.-Japan relationship, a commitment to the defense of South Korea and to a peaceful settlement of the nuclear standoff with Pyongyang, a continuation of Washington's "cooperative, constructive, and candid" relationship with the PRC, and the promotion and expansion of democracy. Unfortunately, it was more of the same from Pyongyang as well, as it continued to boycott the Six-Party Talks. China and Taiwan also continued their familiar one step forward, two steps back dance. Assistant Secretary of State-designate Christopher Hill expressed his desire to "thicken up" multilateral diplomacy in East Asia. The quarter ended with another devastating earthquake in Indonesia. The response to the earlier crisis raised international cooperation to new levels and helped improve the U.S. image in Southeast Asia.

U.S.-Japan: 'History Starts Here' by Brad Glosserman

In the first quarter of 2005, the U.S. and Japan signed a historic declaration that laid a foundation for the future of their security alliance. The Feb. 19 Security Consultative Committee meeting locked in the impressive progress that has been made in the security dimension of the alliance and committed Washington and Tokyo to continuing efforts to modernize their alliance. At the same time, an increasingly contentious trade spat over beef reminded both countries that bad old habits were ever ready to spoil celebrations over "the best relations ever." To help reassure the Japanese that a new foreign policy team in Washington does not augur a shift in U.S. priorities, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made Japan her first stop in East Asia during a six-country Asian tour, where she wowed the crowd despite sending a tough message on beef and walking a careful line on North Korea policy.

U.S.-China: Rice Seeks to Caution, Cajole, and Cooperate with Beijing by Bonnie Glaser

President Bush's second term opened with an active agenda of U.S.-China interactions. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice traveled to Beijing on a six-nation tour of Asia during which she sought to enlist China's help in exerting pressure on North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons. China's National People's Congress passed an anti-secession law that U.S. officials characterized as "unhelpful" and likely to increase cross-Strait tensions. Urging China to enhance its protection of intellectual property rights was the central task of outgoing

Secretary of Commerce Evans' visit to Beijing. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Lawless conducted the first ever "special policy dialogue" between the two militaries. Senior U.S. officials voiced concern about China's military buildup and its proliferation activities, and strongly opposed lifting the EU's arms embargo on China.

U.S.-Korea: Tensions Rise Over Sticks and Carrots
by Donald G. Gross

As 2005 opened, North Korea laid down a clear diplomatic marker that it would not rejoin the Six-Party Talks without at least a rhetorical shift in U.S. policy. On Feb. 10, Pyongyang declared that it possessed nuclear weapons. Seeking to keep alive the nuclear negotiations, both the U.S. and South Korea downplayed the announcement. In March, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged North Korea to return to the Six-Party Talks. Rice said the U.S. would pursue "other options in the international system" if Pyongyang continues to refuse to negotiate. North Korea's thinking is not yet known but "realists" in Pyongyang may well prevail in arguing that North Korea has nothing to lose by merely continuing negotiations, while remaining away from the talks would only intensify the country's isolation.

U.S.-Russia: A Reassessment or Business As Usual?
by Joseph Ferguson

The summit meeting between George Bush and Vladimir Putin in Bratislava in February seemed inconclusive at best. While pundits in the West called on President Bush to be tougher on Putin, critics in Russia urged Putin to not "bow down" to the United States. Both presidents seem unsure as to which way they are leaning. Both recognize the strategic necessities that dictate a sound and cordial relationship, but they must also keep a wary eye on their domestic critics. Meanwhile it is clear that the two nations' agendas in Central Asia and the Middle East are starting to diverge. In East Asia the two remain committed to the six-party Korean Peninsula talks, but both Moscow and Washington have a number of unresolved issues in the region that need to be addressed; these issues could affect bilateral relations.

U.S.-Southeast Asia: Aid Burnishes U.S. Image but Other Concerns Persist by Sheldon W. Simon

A massive U.S. relief effort for the tsunami-devastated north Sumatran coast has burnished America's image in Indonesia. Even large Indonesian Muslim organizations that previously voice anti-American views have praised U.S. humanitarian activities. The Bush administration has seized the new positive spirit of Indonesian-U.S. relations to press Congress for the restoration of training and education programs for the Indonesian military. The U.S. expressed disappointment at an Indonesian court's acquittal of radical Jemaah Islamiyah cleric Abu Bakar Bashir on allegations of involvement in the 2002

Bali and 2003 Jakarta Marriott bombings. Bashir received a relatively light 30-month sentence for knowing about the terrorists' plans. The State Department's annual Human Rights Report criticized the Thai government killings of Thai Muslims during efforts to suppress secession activities.

China-Southeast Asia: Assurance and Reassurance by Ronald Montaperto

The shock and devastation of the December tsunami forced an immediate shift in regional priorities. Beijing appears to have responded by adjusting its diplomatic agenda, too. As a result, the first quarter of 2005 was a quiet period for Chinese diplomacy and for China's relations with the subregion. No doubt, the tempo and scope of Chinese activity will return to its previous high level. Having sown the seeds of multilateral cooperation, China's leaders must have been disappointed at their inability to follow up on previous initiatives. By participating actively in the tsunami relief effort, the Chinese seemed to be attempting to assure the subregion of the constancy of their commitment to the welfare of what they increasingly refer to as the "Asian Community."

China-Taiwan: A Little Sunshine through the Clouds by David Brown

Beijing took some significant steps toward improving cross-Strait relations in January by cooperating in New Year charter flights, stopping propaganda criticism of Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian, and sending Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait officials to Koo Chen-fu's funeral in Taipei. Chen took conciliatory steps by reaffirming his inaugural pledges concerning constitutional reform and appointing as premier Frank Hsieh Chang-ting, who quickly set a more moderate tone. Beijing's National People's Congress adopted in March an anti-secession law (ASL) that emphasizes China's pursuit of peaceful reunification but mandates that unspecified "non-peaceful means" be used if Taiwan seeks to secede from China. When the dust from the ASL controversy settles, the question will be whether Beijing and Taipei are able to follow up on the New Year charter flights.

North Korea-South Korea: A (Potentially Sickening) Game of Chicken by Scott Snyder

The inter-Korean relationship remains on hold. Although there is no chance to speak with North Korea officially, South Koreans still talk about how to fashion more opportunities to pursue one-sided reconciliation with the North. There is also lots of self-criticism about how South Korea can be a better partner to Pyongyang, despite evidence that these brothers are unwilling to provide support or even to take simple actions that might lead to more South Korean largesse. Pyongyang's begrudging attitude was evident in its reaction to South Korean offers of help in dealing with the Avian flu emergency in North Korea, its refusal to accept some assistance in the Kaesong Industrial Zone, and its demand that South Korea expand its annual donation of fertilizer to the DPRK from 200,000 tons to 500,000 tons.

China-Korea: All Eyes on Beijing: Raising the Stakes by Scott Snyder

North Korea's Feb. 10 announcement that it would indefinitely suspend its participation in the Six-Party Talks

triggered a series of intensive consultations regarding the North Korean nuclear weapons program. China's diplomacy with both Koreas intensified accordingly. PRC-DPRK omacy reached the highest levels, with an exchange of messages between President Hu Jintao and Central Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong-il and a March visit by DPRK Prime Minister Pak Pong-ju to Beijing. There was also an intensification of diplomatic contact between Beijing and Seoul. A series of diplomatic setbacks occurred in the PRC-South Korean relationship, including the shutdown of a press conference that ROK assemblymen tried to hold at a Beijing hotel.

Japan-China: Trying to Get Beyond Yasukuni by James J. Przystup

The New Year opened with promise; Prime Minister Koizumi did not visit the Yasukuni Shrine. While old issues – history and nationalism, sovereignty in the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands and the East China Sea, the extent and scope of the Japan-U.S. alliance (Taiwan) – lingered, if not intensified, political leaders and diplomats worked to repair strained political relations. The spirit of the Santiago and Vientiane Summits, in particular dealing "appropriately" with the Yasukuni issue, appeared to suffuse political and diplomatic engagement. Meanwhile, economic relations continued to expand – China replaced the United States as Japan's top trading partner in 2004. The next three months promise a continuation of "cold politics and hot economics" with the very real prospect that politics may get much colder before there is any real thaw.

Japan-Korea: History Impedes the Future by David Kang

During the first three months of 2005, some tiny, uninhabited rocks in the middle of the sea between Japan and Korea became the source of a major diplomatic spat between both Koreas and Japan. "Who owned Tokdo/Takeshima first" is evidently more important to Japan and South Korea than is concluding a free-trade agreement, resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, or sorting out relations between China and the U.S. Japan-North Korea relations also remain sidetracked in a dispute over abductees, and Japan moved toward economic sanctions even as the Six-Party Talks stalled. This might be fitting: although 2005 is "Japan-Korea Friendship Year" and marks the 40th anniversary of normalized ties between the two countries, it is also the 100th anniversary of Japan's annexation of Korea.

China-Russia: Back to Geostrategies by Yu Bin

In sharp contrast to the "oil-politicking" of much of the previous year, strategic gaming topped the bilateral agenda for the first quarter of 2005. Several high-profile visits occurred, including the first China-Russia intergovernmental consultation on security issues and three rounds of talks between top military officers to prepare for the first ever joint military exercise in the fall. The warming trend in Chinese-Russian bilateral relations across political, security, and economic areas has had its own momentum, caused at least partially by a colder external environment. And for both, instability, corruption, and even violence around their periphery seems to continue and directly affects the operation of their regional mechanisms.