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Regional Overview: Mixed Signals, Mixed Results

by Ralph A. Cossa

The North Koreans stayed away from the Six-Party Talks this quarter, citing “mixed” and “confusing” signals from Washington. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick reassured ASEAN about Washington’s commitment to the region, a message somewhat undercut when it was revealed that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would likely not attend the ASEAN Regional Forum in late July. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld also sent mixed signals at the Shangri-La Dialogue, welcoming an emerging China “committed to peaceful solutions” as “an important new reality” while raising questions about the extent of its military build-up. Mixed signals also came from ASEAN as to whether Burma/Myanmar would forego its chairmanship of ASEAN in mid-2006.

U.S.-Japan: Tokyo’s Trials by Brad Glosserman

Two issues dominated U.S.-Japan relations this quarter: Tokyo’s bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and the continuing effort to transform the U.S. military presence in Asia and how the resulting deployments in Japan will look. There was no resolution to either issue, nor will there be one in the immediate future. Smaller trade issues were also back on the bilateral agenda. The 60th anniversary of the end of World War II could also provide a reckoning: will it be the moment that Japan assumes a new role in Asia and the world, or will the accounting of history that has so roiled Tokyo’s neighbors engulf the bilateral relationship?

U.S.-China: Disharmony Signals End to Post-Sept. 11 Honeymoon by Bonnie Glaser and Jane Skanderup

America’s grievances with China mounted this quarter. The Bush administration stepped up pressure on Beijing to appreciate its currency, hoping to fend off criticism that China is stealing U.S. jobs and unfairly creating a massive trade surplus with the U.S. Washington leaned harder on Beijing to apply pressure on North Korea to rejoin the Six-Party Talks. China’s military buildup also came under sharper criticism, along with human rights abuses, suppression of political dissent, and foot-dragging on implementation of political reforms. President Bush and his Cabinet attempted to keep the bilateral relationship on an even keel while urging Chinese leaders to make their policies more compatible with U.S. national interests.

U.S.-Korea: Good News Summit Kicks Disputes Down the Road by Donald G. Gross

Speculation about a DPRK nuclear test spiked tensions on the Korean Peninsula as Pyongyang refused to return to the Six-Party Talks. Pyongyang removed spent fuel rods from its five-megawatt reactor, and tested a short-range missile. The U.S. moved 15 stealth fighters to South Korea, broke off talks on recovering Korean War remains, and considered seeking UN sanctions against North Korea. South Korea focused instead on the mid-May inter-Korea meeting, the first round of ministerial-level talks in 10 months. Presidents George Bush and Roh Moo-hyun held a summit June 10 where they emphasized strategic agreement on the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance and a peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue.

U.S.-Russia: Further Strategic Disconnect

by Joseph Ferguson

Since late 2001, leaders in Moscow and Washington have tried to minimize political differences to maximize the effectiveness of the “strategic partnership” in its struggle against terrorism. The series of mini-revolutions in the former Soviet republics along Russia’s border may have marked the beginning of the end of this so-called strategic partnership. Moscow now has serious concerns about the penchant for Washington to “export” revolution to Eurasia. Washington, meanwhile, continues to view political developments in Russia with great displeasure. U.S.-Russian cooperation in East Asia seems to have reached its limit, as Moscow looks more to Beijing as a partner, along with New Delhi.

U.S.-Southeast Asia: Summitry Hints of a More Activist Approach by Catharin Dalpino

The U.S. attempted to maintain momentum in relations with Southeast Asia created by the tsunami relief effort. Deputy Secretary of State Zoellick travelled throughout the region, and proclaimed a new policy of greater attention to the region. President Bush hosted Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, inaugural visits to Washington for each. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld attended the Shangri-La security meeting and criticized Beijing. Indonesia was of two minds about the U.S.: tsunami aid polished the U.S. image, but reports of Islamic prisoner abuse triggered fresh resentment. U.S. military cooperation moved toward a more regional approach, while several rounds of bilateral trade talks were held. Human rights remained central to U.S. policy in Burma as Washington prepared to renew sanctions and made clear its opposition to Rangoon's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2006.

China-Southeast Asia: Dancing with China

by Ronald N. Montaperto

Nations of Southeast Asia threw off the torpor induced by the tsunami of December 2004 and returned to business as usual. Beijing seized the opportunity and immediately reenergized plans placed in abeyance by the disaster. President Hu Jintao's and Chairman Wu Bangguo's travels showed the softer side of China with several economic agreements being finalized. The result was another series of successes in Beijing's drive to gain acceptance as a good neighbor and further enhance its regional status. In the multilateral area, China partnered well with ASEAN. These accomplishments, the result of incremental steps, could still go wrong if other factors supervene.

China-Taiwan: Opposition Leaders Visit China

by David Brown

The visits of Kuomintang Chairman Lien Chan and People's First Party Chairman James Soong Chu-yu to China have ameliorated cross-Strait relations. The visits illustrated the potential for dialogue if a different government were in office in Taipei, and produced a new verbal formula that could bridge differences over preconditions for talks with a future government. However, the visits have poisoned the atmosphere between Beijing and Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian. There is no prospect for political dialogue between the two. Furthermore, domestic politics is complicating the possibility of progress on functional issues such as transportation, agricultural exports, and tourism, which would be beneficial to both sides, particularly Taiwan.

North Korea-South Korea: Who's Singing Whose Song?

by Aidan Foster-Carter

The prospects for inter-Korean relations appear more propitious than they have for at least a year. Not only has Pyongyang ended its boycott of most forums of North-South dialogue created after the June 2000 Pyongyang summit, but it has agreed to deepen and extend these in significant ways. If a 12-point joint statement signed June 23 is fully adhered to, there will be a busy calendar. Besides such familiar fora as ministerial talks, the joint economic committee, and family reunions, there are to be military talks plus new panels on cooperation in farming and fisheries. North Korea has even agreed to discuss the sensitive issue of persons "missing" from the Korean War. Yet shadows persist. North Korea might not deliver.

China-Korea: Pursuing Super Economic Cooperation

by Scott Snyder

The torrid growth in China-ROK bilateral trade relations has slowed by half in the first part of 2005 after expanding by almost 40 percent to \$79.3 billion in 2004. Nonetheless, South Korean firms are working with their government to lobby for expanded access to China's domestic market. Presidents Hu Jintao and Roh Moo-hyun met briefly on the sidelines of Moscow's World War II commemoration, and Foreign Ministers Ban Ki-moon and Li Zhaoxing also met on the side of an Asia-Europe Meeting for consultations on the North

Korean nuclear issue, including a "balanced" rebuke to both the U.S. and DPRK. Despite extensive China-DPRK diplomatic activity in early April, the DPRK at quarter's end, had still not set a date for resuming its participation in the Six-Party Talks.

Japan-China: No End to History

by James J. Przystup

Throughout the quarter, history demonstrated its power over the Japan-China relationship. There were anti-Japanese riots, Vice Premier Wu Yi's snub of Koizumi, and June debates over Yasukuni and China policy within the Liberal Democratic Party and governing coalition. Sovereignty issues over the Senkaku islands and East China Sea were caught up in surging nationalisms on both sides. The Japanese prime minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine touched almost every aspect of the relationship. Even traditionally robust commercial and economic ties wobbled.

Japan-Korea: Little Progress on North Korea or History Disputes

by David Kang and Ji-Young Lee

North Korea and history dominated Japan-Korea relations this quarter. Little progress toward resolution was made on either issue. Japan continued to mull sanctions or other measures against the North, although Prime Minister Koizumi publicly disavowed sanctions in early June. South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and Koizumi met in Korea for a summit that failed to bring any progress on the range of issues, from the disputed Tokdo/Takeshima territory to Yasukuni Shrine visits and how Japan's middle-school textbooks treat the past. Japan and South Korea continued to deepen their relationship, but increasing economic interdependence has not dampened political disputes.

China-Russia: Politics of Anniversaries and Beyond

by Yu Bin

Russian and Chinese leaders commemorated the 60th anniversary of Russia's victory in World War II, mended fences in Central Asia in the wake of a surge of "color revolutions" in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, and toyed with the idea of a multilateral world order with a Russia-China-Indian trio in Vladivostok. The quarter ended with President Hu Jintao's state visit to Russia, which aimed to take the strategic partnership to a new height. Meanwhile, Russian and Chinese generals were hammering out details of their first-ever joint exercises in eastern China to be held in the third quarter. Meetings of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization provided opportunities for policy coordination and competition.