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Regional Overview: They're Baaaack! by Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman

The US is back in Asia! This was the central theme of President Obama's major Asia policy speech, delivered in Tokyo. Kim Jong-il also hinted that Pyongyang might come back to the Six-Party Talks after a visit to the North Korean capital by Ambassador Stephen Bosworth. Kim did not meet Bosworth but he did meet Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. Washington's commitment to multilateral cooperation was renewed at the APEC leaders meeting and Obama convened the first-ever full ASEAN-US summit. Historic rivalries within Southeast Asia returned to the front-burner as Thailand and Cambodia turned up the heat in a very un-ASEAN way. Asia's economies appear to be returning from the dead while Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's proposal for a new Asia-Pacific Community refuses to die.

US-Japan Relations: Adjusting to Untested Political Terrain by Michael J. Green and Nicholas Szechenyi

The quarter saw the US-Japan alliance enter one of the greatest periods of uncertainty in recent memory. Many of the populist policy proposals of the DPJ fell by the wayside as the party settled into power. On the foreign policy front, the new government announced Japan would terminate a refueling mission supporting coalition operations in Afghanistan, but unveiled a \$5 billion aid package focused on infrastructure and vocational training. President Obama and Prime Minister Hatoyama met in November, but summitry did little to conceal Washington's frustration with Tokyo's conflicting messages about realigning bases in Okinawa and Hatoyama's pledge to move forward with an "East Asia Community" in order to reduce Tokyo's "dependence" on the US.

US-China Relations: Obama-Hu Summit: Success or Disappointment? by Bonnie Glaser

President Obama's first-ever trip to China was the main attraction of the fourth quarter. In addition to meeting Chinese leaders, Obama held an assembly with Chinese students in Shanghai. The two sides signed a joint statement that highlighted the depth and breadth of the relationship and promised greater cooperation. Nevertheless, the US media mostly faulted the president for not making sufficient progress on a number of problems. The Copenhagen climate talks garnered much attention in December as negotiations between China and the US occupied the meeting's spotlight and ultimately decided its outcome. Trade friction continued to intensify with both countries launching new investigations and imposing duties on several products. The military relationship took a step forward with the visit to the US by Xu Caihou, vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission.

US-Korea Relations: The New Old Reliable
by Victor Cha and Ross Matzkin-Bridger

The quarter saw a number of significant developments. President Obama made his first trip to Seoul in November and Ambassador Bosworth traveled to Pyongyang in December. Obama's visit marked the continuation of an historical high in relations as he and President Lee Myung-bak found common ground on North Korea and inched forward with the Korea-US free trade agreement. Meanwhile, Bosworth's three days of talks with North Korean officials brought the most encouraging signs of a return to the six-party process since talks broke down at the end of 2008. The Obama administration is faring well on the Korean Peninsula, even as relations with other regional powers become more complicated. Those accompanying Obama acknowledged that Korea was the "best stop" on the trip.

US-Russia Relations: START-over for the New Year
by Joseph Ferguson

The quarter proved to be a quiet one. Although there were no major bilateral rifts, several issues continue to fester, including the impasse over the Iranian nuclear program. The biggest disappointment, however, may have been the failure to reach an agreement on the replacement for the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Negotiations are set to resume in January, but end-of-year remarks by Prime Minister Putin about the dangers of the US ballistic missile defense system threaten to throw a wrench into the discussions. Meanwhile, the long-awaited East Siberian pipeline to carry oil destined for Asian markets has finally come on line.

US-Southeast Asia Relations: Engagement with Burma Ramps Up by Sheldon Simon

US efforts to convince Burma's military government to open its political system to the democratic opposition and release political prisoners prior to scheduled 2010 elections accelerated as President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, and Assistant Secretary of State Campbell all weighed in. The ASEAN states welcomed the first US summit with all 10 members and Secretary General Surin noted that Obama's praise for ASEAN's role debunked claims that it is no longer the centerpiece of the region's architecture. Singapore's prime minister insisted that the US remains Asia's "indispensable" player despite the rise of China and India. In the Philippines, the Visiting Forces Agreement continues to be a political football in domestic politics. On a tip from the US, Thai authorities detained a cargo aircraft coming from North Korea.

China-Southeast Asia Relations: ASEAN and Asian Regional Diplomacy by Robert Sutter and Chin-Hao Huang

The quarter featured high-level Chinese diplomacy in the region. Salient meetings included ASEAN Plus 1 and Asian

leadership summits in Thailand in October, a presidential visit to Malaysia and Singapore, including the APEC leaders forum in Singapore in November, and high-level visits to Australia in late October, and Myanmar and Cambodia in December. Chinese commentary showed some concern over recently heightened US and Japanese diplomatic activism in the region. The South China Sea disputes and tensions along the China-Myanmar border were less prominent than earlier in the year.

China-Taiwan Relations: Moving ahead Slowly

by David G. Brown

Taipei and Beijing resumed progress on economic issues by completing the Memorandums of Understanding on cooperation in regulating the financial sector and signing three technical agreements at the SEF-ARATS talks. Informal talks concerning an Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement continued but no date for starting formal negotiation has been announced. Although reaching compromises on substantive economic issues has proven to be time-consuming, these agreements further integrate the two economies. Taipei has continued to resist pressure from Beijing to address political issues about which opinion in Taiwan remains deeply divided. Cross-Strait trade has recovered quickly from the drop a year ago and should surpass its pre-recession peak in December. Slow progress is likely to continue in the coming months.

North Korea-South Korea Relations: Mixed Signals

by Aidan Foster-Carter

During the quarter, North-South relations maintained the slight improvement seen since late August. This easing is a relief compared to the first year and a half of Lee Myung-bak's presidency, during which ties went from bad to worse. Yet, it is premature to suggest any substantial improvement. Rather, what we see is mixed signals from Pyongyang, and to some extent also from Seoul, as the two governments test and sound each other out. This is not happening in a vacuum, but in the context of two wider imponderables: whether Kim Jong-il will return to nuclear dialogue in any shape or form, plus the opaque and delicate process of installing his third son Kim Jong-eun as his successor. A surprise currency redenomination in December, reportedly provoking protests, is a reminder that the North's internal stability cannot be taken for granted.

China-Korea Relations: China Embraces South and North, but Differently

by Scott Snyder and See-won Byun

The last quarter raised hopes for developments in China's relations with both Koreas. Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping received head-of-state treatment during his visit to Seoul where he presented proposals to further the China-ROK strategic cooperative partnership, including a call for a free trade agreement. President Lee Myung-bak and Premier Wen Jiabao held bilateral talks in Beijing on the margins of the China-ROK-Japan summit. There were also several exchanges between China and the DPRK as Premier Wen Jiabao led a large delegation to Pyongyang where he was warmly hosted by Kim Jong-il and proposed a comprehensive set of deals with North Korea. President Hu Jintao reportedly extended an invitation to Kim Jong-il to visit China "at a convenient time."

Japan-China Relations: Gathering Momentum

by James J. Przystup

A flurry of high-level contacts marked the quarter. The engagement culminated in the December visit of DPJ Secretary General Ozawa Ichiro to China and his meeting with President Hu Jintao followed by the visit of Vice President Xi Jinping to Japan and his audience with Emperor Akihito. Both Japanese and Chinese political leaders repeatedly made clear their intentions to advance the bilateral relationship. While progress on issues related to joint development of resources in the East China Sea and resolution of the adulterated *gyoza* case remained noticeably lacking, public opinion polls suggested an upward trend in the way both Japanese and Chinese viewed each other and the bilateral relationship.

Japan-Korea Relations: Small Signs of Progress

by David Kang and Ji-Young Lee

Relations between Japan and the two Koreas were relatively uneventful. The new Hatoyama government quickly began to give more attention to its relations with its East Asian neighbors and hinted at a change in priorities on North Korea. South Korea and Japan said mostly all the right things, even while substantively it seemed fairly clear that they continued to have very different opinions about territorial and historical disputes. However, no real movement or dramatic changes came about during the quarter, setting the stage for 2010 – the 100th "anniversary" of Japan's annexation of Korea.

China-Russia Relations: Mr. Putin Goes to China: Ten Years After

by Yu Bin

The last month of 2009 was significant for petro-politics on the Eurasian continent. In mid-December, the 1,800 km Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China natural gas pipeline went into operation, which connects with the China's West-East trunk line and has an annual capacity of 40 billion cubic meters. Two weeks later, Prime Minister Putin officially commissioned the first section of the nearly 5,000 km Eastern Siberia-Pacific-Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline to the newly built Kozmino oil port near Vladivostok. Thus, Moscow and Beijing significantly elevated their postures in the global game of energy diversification. Putin's October visit to China resulted in a dozen high-value commercial deals, but also reflected his 10-year legacy in shaping Russian-Chinese relations and their mutual perceptions.

India-U.S. and India-East Asia Relations: Treading Water

by Satu Limaye, East-West Center

India-US and India-East Asia relations saw no dramatic developments in 2009. Washington and New Delhi, both with new governments, spent much of the year adjusting to each other. The overall mood of bilateral relations was subdued not so much because of a specific disagreement or problem, but because Washington was preoccupied with other priorities and New Delhi was coming to terms with the fact that it was not one of them. India-East Asia ties ranged from outreach to Mongolia to Papua New Guinea to the Pacific Islands Forum and included the signing of the India-ASEAN FTA in goods. But, India's relations with East Asia were dominated by Sino-Indian tensions inflamed by the media in both countries.