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Regional Overview: (Almost) Everyone Pivots to the Asia-Pacific by Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman

A trifecta of international gatherings – the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders Meeting in Beijing, the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Nay Pyi Taw, and the G-20 Summit in Brisbane – had heads of state from around the globe, including US President Barack Obama, flocking to the Asia-Pacific as 2014 was winding to a close. North Korea was not included in these confabs but its leaders (although not the paramount one) were taking their charm offensive almost everywhere else in an (unsuccessful) attempt to block a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Pyongyang's human rights record. More successful was Pyongyang's (alleged) attempt to undermine and embarrass Sony Studios to block the release of a Hollywood film featuring the assassination of Kim Jong Un.

US-Japan Relations: Heading to the End Zone on TPP and Defense by Michael J. Green and Nicholas Szechenyi

Weak economic data prompted Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to postpone painful tax increases and call a snap election to extend the window in which to advance his policy agenda. US-Japan negotiations on TPP slowed, but President Obama made his first significant public push in December on TPP. Discussions on revising the bilateral defense guidelines advanced somewhat but were extended into 2015 to better coincide with the legislative debate in Japan on defense policy. Trilateral coordination with Australia and South Korea reflected a shared commitment to network the alliance agenda. Public opinion surveys revealed a foundation of support for the US-Japan relationship across a range of issue areas. All of the bilateral agenda on defense and trade was aimed at a potential Abe visit to Washington in the spring.

US-China Relations: Summit Provides Renewed Momentum for Better Ties by Bonnie Glaser and Jacqueline Vitello

The highlight of the final months of 2014 was the summit between Presidents Obama and Xi Jinping, which produced agreements on visa extensions, military confidence-building measures, climate change, and information technology. Alongside progress, tensions persisted over China's activities in the South China Sea and its promotion of regional security architecture fashioned by Asian nations, with the US role unclear at best. The 25th Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade (JCCT) convened in Chicago in mid-December. In Hong Kong, the "Umbrella Movement" introduced a new source of friction in the bilateral relationship as Beijing suspected Washington's instigation behind the scenes.

US-Korea Relations: Common Cause as DPRK Threats Increase by Stephen Noerper

The closing months of 2014 saw new US vulnerabilities as North Korea purportedly leveled a massive cyberattack against Sony Pictures Entertainment. President Obama attributed the attack to the DPRK and promised a "proportional" response. Citing an increase in the broader DPRK threat, the US and ROK affirmed common cause and new resolve, agreeing to delay transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) over ROK forces. Meanwhile, North Korea's human rights record was condemned as the UN General Assembly voted for a referral to the International Criminal Court. The DPRK responded with a diplomatic "charm" offensive involving senior-level engagements around the globe and the release of three US detainees.

US-Southeast Asia Relations: Diplomatic Gambits by Sheldon Simon

Senior US officials at ASEAN-based meetings touted the Association's centrality for the Obama administration's rebalance to Asia. Nevertheless, a US proposal at the East Asia Summit (EAS) in November that all South China Sea claimants "freeze" efforts to alter the status quo on the islets they control was not endorsed. In the Philippines, there was some progress on implementing the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, though opponents have challenged its constitutionality. The US partially lifted its arms embargo with Vietnam, agreed to resume *Cobra Gold* in Thailand in 2015, and expressed approval of Indonesia's ambitious maritime development program. Human rights concerns were noted by US officials in response to ongoing ethnic tensions in Burma and the Najib government's decision to repeal the 1948 Sedition Act in Malaysia.

China-Southeast Asia Relations: Beijing Sets Positive Agenda, Plays down Disputes by Robert Sutter and Chin-Hao Huang

President Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders were actively engaged in Southeast Asia. They established or reinforced initiatives that employ Chinese wealth and economic connections to attract neighbors to China, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Maritime Silk Road through Southeast Asia. Against this background, attention to China's territorial disputes in the South China Sea declined and efforts to stabilize relations with Vietnam moved forward. The implications of these Chinese initiatives remain hard to determine as China has endeavored before to focus on positive features of mutual development only to find changing circumstances lead to differences over sovereignty claims, overshadowing common ground.

[China-Taiwan Relations: Cross-Strait Relations on Hold](#)

by David G. Brown and Kevin Scott

Campaigning for local elections in Taiwan delayed any progress toward resolving the deadlock in the Legislative Yuan over cross-strait issues. While emphasizing continuity in its peaceful development policy, Beijing is concerned over the Democratic Progressive Party's increasing prospects and consequently has laid down markers aimed at the party. Student protests in Hong Kong underlined the fundamental political differences between Taiwan and the mainland and occasioned some sharp exchanges between the Ma administration and the Chinese Communist Party leadership. The Kuomintang's large defeat in the local elections surprised everyone and creates new challenges for Beijing in the lead-up to Taiwan's presidential and legislative elections in early 2016.

[North Korea-South Korea Relations: Summit in 2015? A Tough Climb](#)

by Aidan Foster-Carter

As so often in inter-Korean relations, the final four months of 2014 proved a mixed bag. Despite several advance tantrums, North Korea sent a full sports squad to compete in the 17th Asian Games (Asiad) held in Incheon. Better yet, three top DPRK leaders suddenly showed up at the closing ceremony and the two Koreas agreed to hold high-level talks. Then the let-down: Pyongyang added unacceptable conditions so the talks were not held and relations reverted to the usual bickering, sniping, and blame games. In the process, Seoul seemed to pass up several opportunities to engage senior leaders from the North. The turn of the year brought fresh hope as both Koreas unexpectedly raised the possibility of high-level meetings, but the issue of preconditions is percolating below the surface.

[China-Korea Relations: Beijing Ties Uneven with Seoul, Stalled with Pyongyang](#)

by Scott Snyder and See-won Byun

Although North Korea's diplomatic activity in 2014 spiked with senior-level outreach to Southeast Asia, Iran, Russia, the Middle East, Africa, and the UN, Beijing has been little more than a stopover for these officials. Security and economic ties remain strained as Pyongyang continues its dual pursuit of nuclear and economic development. In contrast, South Korean politicians and diplomats have been flocking to Beijing for endless consultations. Multilateral engagements were the primary venue for maintaining the momentum in high-level exchanges following the Xi-Park summit in July. The seemingly perennial agenda for discussion has been North Korea and China-South Korea trade, including the announcement that the two countries would meet their end-of-year target to conclude negotiations on a free trade agreement.

[Japan-China Relations: A Handshake at the Summit](#)

by James Przystup

Prime Minister Abe realized his long quest for a summit with President Xi during the APEC meeting in Beijing. The picture of the encounter – Xi's averted gaze at the handshake – spoke volumes, underscoring the politically sensitive issues that trouble the relationship: disputed history, Yasukuni, and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. China commemorated several anniversaries including the victory over Japan, the Mukden

Incident, and the Nanjing massacre. In the East China Sea, Chinese Coast Guard ships regularly operated in Japan's contiguous zone, while asserting administrative jurisdiction and frequently entering Japan's territorial waters. Chinese fishing boats engaged in coral poaching within Japan's EEZ. Polls in both countries revealed mutually strong negative feelings.

[Japan-Korea Relations: How \(Juicy\) Tabloid News Subsumed Relations](#)

by David Kang and Jiun Bang

Despite continued political bickering between Japan and its neighbors, Chinese and Korean tourism to Japan reached record heights in 2014. While the increase can be partly attributed to the plunging value of the yen, it also emphasizes one fact: the people of Northeast Asia are deeply interconnected in a number of ways. It is ironic that while both Japan and South Korea use the same characters and pronunciation for both "past" and "future," there is little to suggest a consensus on either the past or the future. Nevertheless, the process of seeking some accord dominated the relationship in the final months of 2014 as evidenced by occasional meetings and brief encounters on the sidelines of multilateral conferences. To an optimist, there was no single dispute that consumed the bilateral relationship; to a cynic, there was no observable progress resulting from the meetings.

[China-Russia Relations: Russia's Pride and China's Power](#)

by Yu Bin

For Russia and China, the last four months of 2014 began with the welding of the first joint of the 4,000-km East Siberian-China gas line near Yakutsk. At yearend, both countries were relieved by the safe return of a Siberian tiger to Russia after two months of roaming in China. In between, top leaders met several times at multilateral events (SCO, APEC, and G-20). Most interactions were business as usual as the two countries cooperated, competed, and compromised over a range of issues. Increased Western sanctions against Russia, plus a steep drop in oil prices, led to a lively debate in China about how it should help Russia. This public discourse was partly "reset" with Russian Ambassador Sergey Razov telling his Chinese audience that Russia needs China's diplomatic support, not its economic assistance.

[India-East Asia Relations: Acting East under Prime Minister Modi?](#)

by Satu Limaye

Since Narendra Modi was inaugurated as India's new prime minister on May 26, his government has conducted robust and wide-ranging bilateral meetings with East Asian leaders and attended the East Asia Summit (EAS), the India-ASEAN Summit, and the G-20 Summit. Modi is seeking to create a new narrative for India-East Asia relations, saying at the EAS that he is seeking to "turn our 'Look East Policy' into 'Act East Policy'." A second distinctive element of current India-East Asia relations is that it marks the third decade of India's "Look East" policy launched in the early 1990s. This is, then, the third decade of India's "third incarnation" as an Asian player – the first incarnation covering the millennia of historical, religious, and civilizational connections and the second incarnation covering the immediate post-1947 independence period until the early 1960s.