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**Regional Overview: A Pivotal Moment for US Foreign Policy?** by Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman

It's been an Asia-centric four months. The US proclaimed America's "pivot" toward Asia, while North Korea faced a pivotal moment following the death of Kim Jong Il. President Obama conducted a broad swing through the region in November, starting in Honolulu where he hosted the APEC Leaders' Meeting before pivoting first to Australia, where he announced a plan to begin rotating US Marines through Darwin, and then on to Indonesia, where he became the first US president to participate in the East Asia Summit. Even more pivotal was Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Burma/Myanmar. While geopolitics was at the forefront for the US, regional governments were focused on economic developments. China, Japan, and South Korea continue their march toward deeper integration. The Asia-Pacific region should set the pace for global growth, but the many transitions of 2012 will introduce considerable uncertainty.

**US-Japan Relations: Big Points on the Scoreboard; Can Noda Make It?** by Michael J. Green and Nicholas Szechenyi

Prime Minister Noda accomplished important steps including the selection of the *F-35* as Japan's next-generation fighter, relaxing the three arms export principles, and announcing a decision to join negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership – all of which demonstrated Tokyo's readiness to revive the economy and strengthen security ties and capabilities. At the same time, the government's support rate began to collapse in a pattern eerily similar to Noda's five predecessors, raising questions about his ability to follow through on political commitments related to TPP. President Obama met Noda at the United Nations in New York and at the APEC forum in Hawaii in an active season of bilateral diplomacy. Public opinion surveys revealed generally positive views of the US-Japan relationship in both countries but the impasse over relocating Marine Corps Air Station Futenma fueled negative perceptions in Japan.

**US-China Relations: US Pivot to Asia Leaves China off Balance** by Bonnie Glaser and Brittany Billingsley

A spate of measures taken by the Obama administration to bolster US presence and influence in the Asia-Pacific was met with a variety of responses from China. Official reaction was largely muted and restrained; media responses were often strident and accused the US of seeking to contain and encircle China. Tension in economic relations increased as the US stepped up criticism of China's currency and trade practices, and tit-for-tat trade measures took place with greater frequency. Amid growing bilateral friction and discontent, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade (JCCT)

convened in Chengdu, China. An announcement by the US of a major arms sale to Taiwan in September prompted China to postpone a series of planned exchanges, but the Defense Consultative Talks proceeded as planned in December.

**US-Korea Relations: Death of Kim Jong Il**

by Victor Cha and Ellen Kim

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's state visit to the US attested to the strength of the relationship and the personal ties between Presidents Obama and Lee. The timely passage of the KORUS FTA in the US was the big deliverable for the summit. Final ratification of the FTA in both countries clears one longstanding issue and lays the foundation for greater economic integration and a stronger alliance. The most shocking news was the death of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in late December. His death disrupted US-DPRK talks as North Korea observed a mourning period. The US and South Korea spent the last two weeks of December quietly watching developments in North Korea as the reclusive country accelerated its succession process to swiftly transfer power to the anointed successor, Kim Jong Un.

**US-Southeast Asia Relations: Rebalancing**

by Sheldon Simon

With visits to Hawaii, Indonesia, Australia, the Philippines, and Burma, President Obama and Secretaries Clinton and Panetta demonstrated the US commitment to the region despite concern over the anticipated decline in the US defense budget. Generally, the additional US forces are seen as evidence of Washington's decision to remain involved in regional security. At the East Asia Summit, Obama outlined his hope that it could serve as a high-level security conclave whose agreements would be implemented through other multilateral organizations. In the Philippines and Indonesia, Clinton and Obama promised naval and air force upgrades to each. Hoping for a breakthrough in US-Burma relations, Obama sent Clinton to see whether the situation warranted the easing of US economic sanctions and if Naypyidaw was moving to meet US conditions for the restoration of full diplomatic relations.

**China-Southeast Asia Relations: Setback in Bali, Challenges All Around**

by Robert Sutter and Chin-Hao Huang

China endeavored to win regional influence and goodwill by emphasizing reassurance and mutually beneficial relations with Southeast Asian counterparts. Nevertheless, it failed to keep the issue of the South China Sea off the agenda at the East Asia Summit as Premier Wen Jiabao was placed on the defensive and compelled to defend China's approach to resolving territorial and maritime security issues. Official Chinese commentaries reacted to the setback in Bali with criticism directed at the US, but they tended to avoid

hyperbole seen in unofficial Chinese media. They also registered opposition to initiatives by Japan and India regarding Southeast Asia and the South China Sea that were seen as at odds with Chinese interests. Myanmar's decision to stop a major hydroelectric dam project being built by Chinese firms raised questions about China's influence in the country while Myanmar's new civilian government tried to improve relations with the US and other powers.

### **China-Taiwan Relations: Toward a Crucial Election**

by David G. Brown

The campaign leading to Taiwan's Jan. 14 presidential election has dominated cross-strait developments. Opposition candidate Tsai Ing-wen has continued her rejection of the "1992 consensus" and criticized President Ma Ying-jeou for suggesting he might consider negotiating a peace accord with Beijing. Meanwhile, Beijing has emphasized its wish to further develop relations on the basis of the "1992 consensus," without which relations will regress. Therefore, the outcome of the elections will have a decisive impact. Ma's re-election would permit further gradual progress; Tsai's election will likely lead Beijing to suspend dialogue and domestic pressures would probably produce a tougher policy toward Tsai's administration.

### **North Korea-South Korea Relations: A New Era?**

by Aidan Foster-Carter

No reader of *Comparative Connections* needs telling that Kim Jong Il died of a heart attack on Dec. 17. Kim's death poses a dilemma. In one sense it changes everything. The DPRK is now sailing into uncharted waters, formally under a greenhorn skipper whose seamanship is untested and unknown – like almost everything else about him, except that during his Swiss schooldays he was a Chicago Bulls fan. To that extent, most of what transpired between the two Koreas during the past four months is already history; it may be no guide to what will unfold now in the era of Kim Jong Un.

### **China-Korea Relations: New Challenges in the Post-Kim Jong Il Era**

by Scott Snyder and See-won Byun

Beijing underscored maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula following Kim Jong Il's death. DPRK leadership succession raises questions about the future direction of China's Korea policy, which was most recently reaffirmed during an October visit to the two Koreas by Vice Premier Li Keqiang, the presumed successor of Premier Wen Jiabao. Prior to Kim's death, China and North Korea maintained regular contacts with senior national, party, and military officials. There have also been mutual efforts to stabilize Sino-South Korean relations despite many differences that have risen in the aftermath of North Korea's 2010 provocations.

### **Japan-China Relations: Another New Start**

by James J. Przystup

Noda Yoshihiko became prime minister of Japan in early September and met President Hu Jintao at the G20 Summit and the APEC meeting. On both occasions, they agreed to take steps to strengthen the mutually beneficial strategic relationship – and again during Noda's visit to China at the end of December. Meanwhile, maritime safety and security

issues in the East China Sea and the South China Sea continued as a source of friction. Tokyo worked to create a maritime crisis management mechanism while Chinese ships continued to intrude into the Japan's EEZ, keeping alive contentious sovereignty issues. Tokyo and Beijing were able to resolve an incident involving a Chinese fishing boat operating in Japanese waters. Repeated high-level efforts by Tokyo to resume negotiations on joint development in the East China Sea failed to yield any progress.

### **Japan-Korea Relations: North Korean Leadership Change Overshadows All**

by David Kang and Jiun Bang

The close of 2011 was dominated by two leadership changes – the mid-December death of Kim Jong Il and the election of Noda Yoshihiko in September. Kim's death is a watershed event that could have repercussions around the region. South Korea and Japan reacted cautiously to the news of Kim's death and the rise of his son, Kim Jong Un. Beyond this event, Korea-Japan relations showed little change. Meanwhile, there were three main trends in relations. First, external forces drove state behavior as evidenced by the almost domino-like efforts at free trade agreements. Second, there was growing recognition of the high domestic political costs associated with non-pliable issues such as the comfort women/sex slaves. Third, there was a realization that change could mean opportunity as Seoul and Tokyo contemplate the post-Kim Jong Il landscape in North Korea.

### **China-Russia Relations: Between Geo-Economic and Geo-Politics**

by Yu Bin

The last four months of 2011 were both ordinary and extraordinary for Beijing and Moscow. There was business as usual as top leaders and bureaucrats from the two countries held frequent meetings. The world around them, however, was riddled with crises and conflicts. Some (Libya and Syria) seriously undermined Chinese and Russian interests; others (Iran and North Korea) were potentially even more volatile, and even dangerous, for the region and the world. Regardless, 2011 was a year full of anniversaries with symbolic and substantive implications for not only China and Russia, but the rest of the world.

### **India-US and India-East Asia: Triangulate This**

by Satu Limaye

Over a decade into the "normalization" of US-India relations and nearly 20 years into India's "Look East" policy, the US-India-East Asia nexus is regularly articulated by the US and India, generally accepted in the region, and shows some signs of gaining traction with the launch of a regular US-India dialogue on East Asia and the first-ever US-India-Japan trilateral dialogue. More broadly, US views of India as part of Asia now encompass mental as well as policy maps (though not yet bureaucratic and all geographical ones) and transcend party politics. Meanwhile, US-India bilateral relations move steadily if sometimes frustratingly forward, and India-East Asia ties continue to deepen and widen though to neither side's full satisfaction. One thing is clear: triangulation depends above all on India's own commitment and actions to build a closer relationship with the wider Asia-Pacific region.