

Comparative Connections

A Quarterly E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations



Regional Overview:

Action for Action, with Mixed Reaction

Ralph A. Cossa, Pacific Forum CSIS
Brad Glosserman, Pacific Forum CSIS

After eight months of inaction, there was a flurry of six-party action at quarter's end. As Pyongyang produced its long-awaited declaration of its nuclear activities, President Bush announced his intention to remove North Korea from the U.S. listing of state sponsors of terrorism and Trading with the Enemy Act (TWEA) restrictions. Pyongyang responded with a made-for-TV demolition of the cooling tower at its Yongbyon nuclear facility. Elsewhere, respective reactions to natural disasters showed how far China has come and Myanmar/Burma still has to go in dealing with the outside world. There was a generally positive reaction to Secretary Gates' Shangri-La statements on U.S. East Asia policy and toward the two U.S. presidential candidates (or their surrogates) early pronouncements about Asia as well. In contrast, there has been almost no reaction at all to Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's call for a more inclusive Asia-Pacific community.

Democracy seemed to be struggling in Thailand and in Mongolia, even as a reshuffling of coalition partners in India promised to resurrect the India-U.S. nuclear deal from the near-dead, just as Indian Prime Minister Singh prepared to meet President Bush along the sidelines of the upcoming G8 meeting in Japan. With this year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders Meeting scheduled for Peru in November, and with leaders from China, South Korea, and India among the invited guests to the July 6-8 summit at Lake Toyako, the G8 meeting will likely serve as President Bush's last opportunity for East Asia multilateral summitry. Finally, a word to our readers in Korea: Get the facts! American beef is safe. Period. End of sentence.

New Year's Eve finally arrives!

On June 26, Pyongyang finally turned over to Six-Party Talks host China its much-anticipated declaration of "all its nuclear activities," although reporting on the still not made public declaration suggests it was far from "complete and correct," at least by Washington's original description. The declaration was supposed to have been delivered by Dec. 31, 2007 but North Korea had been holding out, presumably until it received assurances that Washington would deliver on its end of the deal; namely, removing North Korea from Trading With the Enemy Act restrictions and beginning the 45-day process to take Pyongyang off the State Sponsors of Terrorism list. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice provided those assurances publicly during a speech at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington think tank, on June 18, which apparently opened the door for Pyongyang's action one week later.

As June 26 dawned in Washington, President Bush announced that he was taking the above-promised actions, while cautioning that these could be reversed if Pyongyang did not follow through with verification. “If North Korea makes the wrong choices,” Bush warned, “the United States and our partners in the Six-Party Talks will respond accordingly. If they do not fully disclose and end their plutonium, their enrichment, and their proliferation efforts and activities, there will be further consequences.” Just what these consequences might be was left unsaid.

Some have argued that it would have made more sense to wait until the list was delivered and verified before restrictions were lifted, and they are probably right. Unfortunately, that was not what Washington promised – the Oct. 3 agreement on implementation of this phase of the denuclearization agreement calls for the U.S. delisting and DPRK declaration to take place “in parallel.” If we have learned nothing else about North Korea we should know one thing by now: while Pyongyang might not be too good at living up to its own promises, it will not budge an inch if it perceives that others are not living up to theirs.

Verification remains the key. In her June 26 commentary in the *Wall Street Journal*, timed to coincide with (and set the stage for) President Bush’s announcement, Secretary Rice wrote: “We will not accept [Pyongyang’s] statement on faith. We will insist on verification.” A State Department “Fact Sheet” issued the same day noted that “a comprehensive verification regime would include, among other things, short notice access to declared or suspect sites related to the North Korean nuclear program, access to nuclear materials, environmental and bulk sampling of materials and equipment, interviews with personnel in North Korea, as well as access to additional documentation and records for all nuclear-related facilities and operations.” It further asserted that “any discrepancies in its declaration must be addressed by North Korea until the declaration is deemed to be complete and correct.” This, of course, is Washington’s unilateral definition of what constitutes verification. It remains to be seen if Pyongyang shares this view.

The White House acknowledged that the 60-page declaration did not answer Washington’s concerns about proliferation and uranium enrichment. These issues, it was subsequently learned, were apparently addressed in two separate short declarations presumably handed directly to Washington. Readers of last quarter’s report will recall Assistant Secretary of State and chief Six-Party Talks negotiator Christopher Hill’s assertion that neither separate declarations nor a partial declaration setting aside some of the issues (read: uranium enrichment and alleged support to Syria) was “politically sustainable.” Apparently, even less politically sustainable was a complete lack of forward progress, hence the sudden show of increased U.S. flexibility. Hill’s earlier “all means all” assertions apparently did not mean all in one package after all. Still, IF (and it’s a big IF), the three separate declarations really do (verifiably) answer all of Washington’s plutonium, uranium, and proliferation-associated questions, a major breakthrough has indeed occurred.

Largely overlooked but equally significant (if unappreciated) in the “action for action” drama was Pyongyang’s surprise agreement, during bilateral talks with Japan on June 14, that it would “reinvestigate the abduction issue,” after years of claiming that the issue was settled. There was no indication that the results would be any different and no acknowledgment that additional abductees remain alive in North Korea (as many in Japan are convinced), but the agreement did represent some forward movement on this issue. Recall that President Bush had reportedly

promised that delisting of North Korea would not come without “progress” on the abductee issue. While few in Tokyo seemed to consider the DPRK compromise sufficient, it no doubt required a great deal of behind-the-scenes diplomacy on Hill’s part and could be seen, at least in Washington’s eyes, as having honored President Bush’s pledge. Of note, Pyongyang also promised to hand over to Japan surviving members (and families) of Japanese Red Army terrorists who had hijacked a Japan Airlines plane in 1970 and then received asylum in the North. (The Clinton administration had been prepared years ago to remove Pyongyang from the terrorism sponsors’ list in return for the hijackers’ expulsion.)

One “action for action” that has received little reaction (or recognition, for that matter) was the June 26 “National Emergency Declaration” under which President Bush declared that “it is necessary to continue certain restrictions with respect to North Korea that would otherwise be lifted pursuant to a forthcoming [TWEA] proclamation” given that “the current existence and risk of the proliferation of weapons-usable fissile material on the Korean Peninsula constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.” Sanctions against North Korea applied under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 also remain in effect, which further limits the practical impact of the largely symbolic U.S. delisting actions.

What we (still don’t) know

Volumes have been written commenting on the inadequacy of the North’s June 26 declaration, mostly by pundits (like ourselves) who have not yet seen its contents, which have apparently been kept from the public at Beijing’s request. By all accounts, the declaration deals only with the North’s plutonium-based nuclear weapons program. It apparently also provides a detailed accounting of Pyongyang’s plutonium holdings – which leaks and rumors have reported at somewhere between 25.5 to 38.5 to 40+ kg (with 6-7 kg required for a nuclear weapon) – and the amount used in the North’s October 2006 nuclear test (reportedly 2 kg, about half of what had been previously estimated).

Questions have arisen whether “all” plutonium-related facilities are listed in the declaration. At a minimum, this should include not only the three main facilities at Yongbyon – the 5 megawatt Experimental Reactor, the Reprocessing Plant, and the Nuclear Fuel Rod Fabrication Facility (initially scheduled for complete dismantlement by Dec. 31 2007) – but the identification and dismantlement of the nuclear test site, any weapons fabrication facilities, any nuclear research labs, and, most controversially weapons/fissile material storage facilities. By all accounts, the number of actual weapons is not included in the declaration.

In September 2005, the North pledged to eventually give up all its nuclear weapons but the February and October 2007 implementing agreements make no reference to weapons *per se* and the North has since made it clear that they will only surrender this capability after the U.S. has demonstrated that it no longer has a “hostile policy” toward Pyongyang. “Proof” of this has ranged from calls for diplomatic recognition, the provision of light water reactors (LWRs), the removal of U.S. troops from the Peninsula, etc. Stay tuned on this issue.

Note that the February and October 2007 agreements both specify that the million tons equivalent of aid is in compensation for the disablement of *all* nuclear-related facilities and material, including those yet to be identified but which were expected to be included in the June 26 declaration. Nonetheless, Pyongyang now claims (thus far without contradiction from Washington) that the energy aid is related only to the disabling of Yongbyon, asserting: “While the [Yongbyon] disabling has been completed for more than 80 percent, overall energy cooperation business is going very slowly – at 30 percent to 36 percent.” It would seem that Pyongyang has “renegotiated” the agreements and now expects the full million ton equivalent of oil and assistance for the disablement of Yongbyon and nothing more. Disablement of other nuclear facilities (presuming they are on the “complete and correct” declaration) will apparently now fall into phase three – the dismantlement and abandonment phase.

Hopefully, phase three entails the complete denuclearization of North Korea but this has yet to be clearly or definitively stated. What it is certain to entail is a lot more money, fuel oil, and assistance to North Korea – how much is yet to be negotiated. North Korea continues to insist that it also entails provision of LWRs to the North. In the Sept. 19, 2005 Six-Party Talks Joint Statement, the U.S. promised only to discuss LWRs “at the appropriate time,” making clear that this was after complete denuclearization. The North has been equally clear that the appropriate time was before or simultaneous with denuclearization. In all previous disagreements, the North Korean interpretation seems to have won out, but there are significant legal and political hurdles standing in the way of delivering LWRs to North Korea at this point.

The real and perceived shortcomings of the six-party process and current arrangements notwithstanding, we are clearly better off for having come this far. The demolition of the Yongbyon cooling tower and the near-complete dismantlement of the three nuclear facilities there have removed the North’s ability (at least in the near term) to produce more plutonium, which prevents the situation from getting worse. Accounting for North Korean plutonium stockpiles is another essential step in the denuclearization process, as is the identification (if “complete and correct”) of all its other plutonium-associated facilities. Unfortunately, the North has also learned that if it stubbornly holds out for its own interpretation of agreements, it will likely prevail, and this will make future negotiations and any future implementation process all the more difficult.

***Nargis* hits and the junta misses**

Not all the significant actions taking place this quarter were man-made. Mother Nature included her share, with the worst (in terms of lives lost and opportunities for cooperation missed) taking place in Burma/Myanmar. On May 3, Cyclone *Nargis* hit Burma, devastating the Irrawaddy River delta – one of the country’s and the world’s key rice growing areas – and the nation’s major city, Rangoon. Initial estimates provided an absurdly low death count – 340 people – but the numbers grew exponentially within days, to top 22,000. It is unclear whether this miscount was the result of ignorance on the part of the government or sheer indifference to the scale of the tragedy. By the end of the quarter, the official death toll was 84,537 dead, with 53,836 still missing. More than 1 million people are estimated to have been left homeless, and 2.4 million people have been affected by the cyclone, the worst natural disaster in the country’s history.

The scale of the disaster was compounded by the regime's appalling response. Rather than opening doors to foreign aid, the regime – motivated by a combination of xenophobia, arrogance, and paranoia – decided assistance could only trickle in: for the most part, aid was allowed in, not aid workers who could ensure assistance wasn't stolen and got to groups most in need.

Meanwhile, a week after the cyclone struck, the government went ahead with a referendum on a new constitution, which is supposed to pave the way for democratic elections in 2010. The referendum had previously been denounced by pro-democracy campaigners as a device to prolong military rule, but the cynicism that inspired the holding of the vote rather than devoting full attention to the tragedy was breathtaking.

International condemnation of the military government's actions was widespread. Some governments even contemplated going to the UN for approval of forcible humanitarian intervention under the penumbra of the "responsibility to protect." China and Indonesia rejected that idea. It may have had an impression on Burma's leaders, however: soon after, they allowed in the first load of UN-sponsored relief goods. Visas for relief workers from international aid agencies continued to be held up.

U.S. Pacific Command Commander Adm. Timothy Keating went to Burma to make a personal request to his Burmese counterpart - marking the highest-level military contact between the two countries in decades - but only got a pledge to consider the offer. U.S. vessels stayed near the Burmese coast for weeks in hopes that the aid request would be accepted, but they eventually turned away after getting the cold shoulder. Reportedly, the military government refused the offer for fear that the U.S. relief effort was a cover for an invasion. Some transport aircraft eventually got clearance to take aid into the main airport, but helicopters, desperately needed to get aid to the hardest hit, were denied clearance. Given the treatment the junta gave to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the cold shoulder to the U.S. was nothing exceptional.

Ultimately, ASEAN managed to open the doors somewhat, after a May 19 meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers pressed the country to accept foreign aid. A compromise allowed entry to ASEAN aid workers but there were reports that assessment efforts were stage managed to keep them from getting a complete picture of the tragedy. Nonetheless, ASEAN officials call their intervention a success, an overly generous assessment by most standards.

Nature strikes again in Sichuan

Less than two weeks after Cyclone *Nargis*, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake with an epicenter near the Sichuan provincial capital of Chengdu refocused world attention. Even though exact figures were hard to come by, it was immediately apparent that the quake was one of the worst in Chinese history. By June 30, *Xinhua* reported a death toll of 69,195 with another 374,177 injured and 18,403 missing. Five million were said to be homeless, and another 15 million displaced.

The disaster provided a rallying point for the nation, and an outlet for nationalist sentiment built up during the Olympic torch relay that morphed into anger after protests that looked to many Chinese like a deliberate insult. The natural inclination to help victims was supplemented by a campaign to redirect anger and focus on responding to the disaster. Reports that schools may

have been poorly built, which resulted in a high number of casualties among school children, gave the government even more reason to ensure that public sentiment was properly channeled. The response, official and unofficial, was overwhelming. Compared to the 1976 Tangshan earthquake that claimed over 200,000 lives, the Beijing government was far more capable and better attuned to the needs of the victims. The PLA performed impressively (despite some problems). Most significantly – and in pointed contrast to the Burmese reaction – China quickly opened the door to international aid, accepting not only goods and funds, but even foreign rescue teams for the first time. U.S. officials, from President Bush on down, were quick to offer sympathy, condolences, and help. Aid and disaster relief specialists were dispatched within days; U.S. private sector contributions were even more generous than that of the U.S. government. (For more details, see Bonnie Glaser’s chapter on U.S.-China relations.)

The U.S. as a resident power in Asia

Condolences and renewed offers of help to both China and Burma were also on Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ agenda when he spoke at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on May 31. Gates underscored Washington’s continued commitment to remaining a strong Asia-Pacific power characterizing the U.S. as a “resident” power in Asia that has been and will remain fully engaged in the region. Gates stressed three main points: the U.S. is “a Pacific nation with an enduring role in Asia”; Washington stands “for openness, against exclusivity”; and any new U.S. administration will remain “grounded in the fact that the United States remains a nation with strong and enduring interests in the region.” As expected, he pointed to Washington’s five alliances – with Australia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand – as “the foundation of our security presence,” adding that they were “enabled and strengthened by our relationships with partners and friends.” He stressed the important role of U.S. military presence, in Guam and in the region, as a signal of continued commitment and the ability “to respond quickly to a number of contingencies.”

Gates reassured Washington’s friends and allies in Asia that the Bush administration and any likely successor would be both supportive of and involved in the development of any regional security architecture. “We certainly share an interest in institutionalizing various forums to deal with region-specific problems, and we intend to participate in their evolution,” Gates asserted, even as we “continue to depend on our time-tested Asian alliance architecture, a framework embracing many overlapping security relationships and still evolving after the end of the Cold War.” He did offer some “benchmarks” in judging the new architecture: it should not be a zero-sum game, it should be collaborative and inclusive, and “it can only succeed if we treat the region as a single entity.” The U.S., Gates seemed to be saying, has no problem with Asia-only economic groupings, but when it comes to security architecture, the U.S. must be counted in: “There is little room for a separate ‘East Asian’ order.”

Unlike the speeches of his predecessor, Gates barely mentioned China by name and when he did, it was generally in complimentary or sympathetic terms. He praised Beijing’s “valued cooperation” on Korean Peninsula denuclearization and noted the increased level of engagement between the two militaries, while extending condolences over the tragic loss of life during the Sichuan earthquake.

In his prepared remarks, Gates was factual and largely neutral in discussing Burma, merely noting U.S. willingness to help, despite obstructions, and welcoming ASEAN's leadership in searching for a mechanism to help get aid to those most in need. When asked by a former Singaporean diplomat why Washington was not prepared to change its "failed policy of isolationism" against Rangoon, however, Gates forcefully pointed out that "We have reached out; they have kept their hands in their pockets," adding that to date ASEAN's engagement policy likewise seems to have had "zero influence" on Rangoon. The problem here is not Washington's (or ASEAN's) policies; it's the ruling junta in Burma!

Gates essentially avoided talking about the Middle East or global issues in general, other than to acknowledge regional concerns that U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan were distracting Washington from focusing on Asia, a notion he hoped his speech would serve to disabuse. Refreshingly, nowhere in Gates' speech was there any reference to the global war on terrorism, indicating that the Pentagon has clearly gotten the message that Washington's constant hectoring on this topic is counterproductive and sends the wrong message about U.S. priorities in Asia. What defense establishments in Asia wanted and needed to hear was the reassurance that, despite commitments and distractions elsewhere, Washington remained aware of the region's growing importance and would remain engaged today and into the foreseeable future, regardless of who the next U.S. president might be.

The national interest redux

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice also provided her take on U.S. foreign policy this quarter in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, a stocktaking that echoes her previous analysis published in that same journal in 2000. She again emphasized the need for great power cooperation, applauding the progress with China but insisting that more transparency and more action is needed before Beijing can truly be a "responsible stakeholder." She identified the Six-Party Talks as "an opportunity for cooperation and coordination" to ensure that verifiable denuclearization takes place. She also noted that the parties intend to institutionalize habits of cooperation through the establishment of a Northeast Asian peace and security mechanism, although most observers consider such a step a long way off.

Rice puts the promotion of democracy at the heart of U.S. foreign policy. The deepening of democratization across the Asia Pacific region "is the defining geopolitical event of the 21st century." Alliances are core components of this tide; curious South Koreans note that Rice identifies Australia, Japan and key states in Southeast Asia as allies – and calls South Korea "a global partner." While no slight was intended, one was taken by some in Korea (especially those looking for more excuses to criticize the U.S.) Unlike Gates' Shangri-La address, nearly half of Rice's article is devoted to the Middle East and Iraq. Sadly, and most telling, this is also likely to be how the next administration is forced to handle foreign policy, no matter what its intentions.

The candidates and Asia

The 2008 presidential race was clarified this quarter with Sen. Barack Obama securing the Democratic nomination. That will pit him against Sen. John McCain in the November ballot. Now, the two candidates' foreign policies are coming under growing scrutiny.

McCain. In “Renewing America’s Asia Policy,” published in the *Wall Street Journal* on May 27, Sen. McCain and Sen. Joseph Lieberman provide insight into the Republican candidate’s Asia policy. The commentary begins by noting that “the U.S.-Japan alliance has been the indispensable anchor of peace, prosperity and freedom in the Asia-Pacific for more than 60 years, and its importance will only grow in the years ahead.” Clearly, “Deepening cooperation, consultation and coordination” is critical and McCain’s vision demands more from the alliance, not merely consolidating the gains of the past. The authors back “Japan’s emergence as a global power, encourage its effective diplomacy, and support its bid for permanent membership in the UN Security Council.”

Turning to specific issues, the two governments should expand the North Korean agenda to tackle ballistic missile programs, the abduction of Japanese citizens, and human rights. Similarly, they must work together to press China to be a “responsible stakeholder.” Decrying the protectionist instincts of the Democratic frontrunners, the two men argue that the U.S. should press for greater economic engagement with the dynamic economies of Asia and work to build “an open, inclusive system of international trade.” The U.S. has to “take much more seriously our responsibility to address our contribution to climate change.”

In what is likely to be the most controversial section, the authors put norms and values at the heart of their foreign policy, arguing the two countries “have a clear interest in enshrining these norms and values at the center of our international system.” It is hard to object in theory to “a regional architecture that favors freedom,” but its implementation could be problematic.

Obama. While there has yet to be a similar op-ed from the Democratic candidate himself, the *Asahi Shimbun* printed a comment in late June by Richard Danzig, former secretary of the Navy, and Joseph Nye, former assistant secretary of defense, Harvard professor, and chairman of the Pacific Forum CSIS Board of Governors (“Japan dialogue key to U.S. interests in Asia”), that can be read as an explication of Obama’s views.

They too start by noting that “The U.S.-Japan alliance remains the cornerstone of American policy in the Asia-Pacific region.” Applauding the success of that partnership, they call for its expansion and transition into “much more than bilateral security arrangements. ... By working together, by combining our strengths, Japan and the United States can provide renewed leadership to resolve a host of challenges, from the need to improve energy efficiency, protect the environment and foster the economic development of the world’s poorest countries to enhancing peace and security in East Asia.” (These remarks echo Nye’s comments at the 14th U.S.-Japan Security Seminar, hosted by the Japan Institute of International Affairs and Pacific Forum CSIS, held in March of this year; the report from that meeting will be available shortly.)

Their agenda includes closer cooperation in the Six-Party Talks, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian crises, fighting terrorism and al Qaeda, and transnational challenges, like climate change, avian flu, and breaking the cycle of poverty in Africa. As always, they urge Japan to rejuvenate its economy and develop to its full potential, for Japan’s sake as well as that of its economic partners. Similarly, the two governments should work together to ensure that new

regional architectures are open and inclusive and “protect and advance the interests and values dear to both our countries.”

With East Asia emerging as “the most dynamic region in the world,” Danzig and Nye believe that neither country can afford to take their alliance for granted. “The world’s most pressing challenges ... cannot be successfully addressed without active Asian participation. Close cooperation with Japan is the starting place for all U.S. policies and interests in Asia.”

Building an Asia-Pacific community

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, in a June 4 speech to the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre in Sydney, called for the creation of an all-inclusive Asia Pacific Community by 2020 to help the region maintain security, foster trade, respond to natural disasters and terrorism, and react more quickly to cope with changes brought about by rapid economic growth in the region. He was not, as some newspapers erroneously reported, calling for a European Union in Asia, noting instead that “the European Union does not represent an identikit model of what we would seek to develop in the Asia-Pacific, but what we can learn from Europe is this – it is necessary to take the first step.”

Rudd called for a regional institution “which is able to engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security,” something that current regional institutions (which still have value in their own right according to Rudd) “as currently configured” are not capable of achieving. The silence in response to this proposal has thus far been deafening. It does, however, provide an alternative to calls for a “League of Democracies,” something Rudd has been decidedly cool toward.

Democracy (in)action

Thailand agonists. Pity Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej: he just doesn’t seem to get a break. Having prevailed in elections held early this year to replace the government installed by the military after the September 2006 coup, Samak has been denounced as a surrogate for deposed PM Thaksin Shinawatra, subjected to court challenges, threatened with another coup, and faced - and defeated - a vote of no-confidence. He must be wondering what a guy has to do to get a mandate.

Suspicious about Samak were raised when he campaigned last year as a stand-in for Thaksin. That charge is one of several leveled against the prime minister by the opposition People’s Alliance for Democracy: others included giving land to Cambodia, economic mismanagement, and failing to defend the king. When the government proposed rules to make it harder to dissolve political parties - a response to a Supreme Court case that could go against Samak’s party and force it to be disbanded - protestors took to the streets on May 25. At times, there appeared to be the real danger of violence as the government threatened to clear the streets by force. Some feared the military would use the chaos to launch yet another coup.

Instead, the government backed off, let the demonstrators sound off, and let the opposition have a vote of no-confidence, which was handily defeated after a week-long debate. There are hopes

that this will deflate the anti-government bubble, but it is clear that the passions that drive Thai politics are deep. Entrenched opposition to the Samak government and its policies will continue for the foreseeable future, bubbling over whenever there is a provocation, real or imagined. This is no recipe for stability.

Unrest in Ulan Bator. Mongolian got a taste of extraparliamentary action at the end of the quarter when rioters vented their frustrations in the capital of Ulan Bator, leaving five people dead and injuring more than 200 others. The riots were triggered by allegations of fraud after national elections at the end of June. The elections, the fifth since Mongolia won real independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, were won by the ruling Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, which claimed a 45-seat majority in the 76-seat legislature. The party has been dogged by allegations of corruption and misconduct, but international observers gave the election a seal of approval.

President Nambariin Enkhbayar declared four days of emergency rule in response to the violence and convened an extraordinary session of parliament to figure out what to do next. The state of emergency was lifted on schedule. The general consensus is that better economic policy is critical, but the prospect of instability makes it difficult to create a positive business environment and attract investment.

India rescues nuclear deal?

The Indian government appeared at quarter's end to have salvaged its beleaguered civil nuclear-energy agreement with the United States. After a flurry of political meetings with allies and adversaries, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appeared to have gained the support of a regional political party, the socialist Samajwadi Party, which will not only back the deal but prevent his government from falling. The deal had been attacked by Singh's communist coalition allies, who feared it would give Washington too much influence over India's nuclear programs. They threatened to withdraw support from Singh's government if he moved forward with the nuclear deal. The coalition switch allowed Singh's Congress Party to avoid calling early elections, in which it was expected to lose many representatives in Parliament because of growing concerns over inflation and high oil prices. It also allows Singh to bring some good news to his meeting with President Bush on the sidelines of the G8 meeting in Japan.

Fukuda makes the most of the G8

The July 6-8 G8 Summit in Toyako, Japan provides a fillip to long-suffering Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo, offering him relief from his domestic woes and an opportunity to show international leadership. It was hoped that a strong performance would shore up his standing at home and ease pressure on him to call national elections.

Japan has for over a year made its priorities clear: climate change and development top the agenda. Climbing energy and food prices obliged Tokyo to modify its plan, but those issues still fit comfortably within its anticipated format. Other concerns, such as North Korea's nuclear programs, Iran's nuclear ambitions, the need to complete the Doha Round of trade talks, and dealing with Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe completed the agenda.

In fact, little is likely to come of the meeting. Many of the pledges regarding aid, trade, and the climate, have already been made in previous meetings; the problem is honoring them. Many leaders at the meeting, notably Fukuda, President Bush, and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, are hobbled at home. It isn't clear what leverage any of them have with oil producers in the best of times.

Perhaps most important are the summit side meetings, given the presence of a record number of heads of state (both members and invited guests). For starters, President Bush has some fence mending to do with the Japanese, who were concerned and disturbed by his decision to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, despite the lack of progress regarding the fate of the Japanese abducted by Pyongyang's agents decades ago. PM Singh will no doubt see this as an opportunity to strengthen India's trilateral ties with China and Russia even while breaking new ground with the U.S., while PM Rudd will get a chance to explain Australia's vision of an Asia-Pacific Community first hand while observing G8 events. Another invited guest, ROK President Lee Myung-Bak will no doubt be hoping for more U.S. concessions to ease the "beef crisis" at home. All this and more will be recounted in next quarter's *Comparative Connections*.

Korea: What's the beef?

Finally, we cannot close without a few words on the ongoing protests in Korea over President Lee Myung-bak's decision to lift the five-year restriction against the import of U.S. beef. Protesters have taken to the streets by the thousands and candlelight vigils, last seen in protest to the accidental deaths of two Korean schoolgirls run over by an American military vehicle in 2001, were once again the order of the day. Korean colleagues have been quick to assure us that this is not an anti-American demonstration; for that matter, it's not even really about beef. It's about Korean frustration with its new government, with the decision to lift the restrictions as the convenient vehicle.

We are not convinced! It's hard not to take it personal when groups are protesting the safety of a product that Americans (including Korean-Americans) eat regularly and know is safe, and which is grown and tested under stricter standards than those employed by the Korean government for its own livestock. This is not about food safety – no one has ever died of mad cow disease from eating U.S. beef. But the professional protesters are not deterred by the facts. When U.S. Ambassador Vershbow tried to point out that if people looked at the science behind the controversy, they would determine that the beef was safe, opponents disingenuously accused the ambassador of claiming that "Koreans couldn't understand science," causing a protest within a protest and ultimately forcing the ambassador to apologize for telling the truth.

As an ironic footnote, when U.S. beef finally reappeared on Korean shelves in early July, suppliers could not keep up with the demand. Protests aside, Korean consumers still know a good deal when they see one.

Regional Chronology

April-June 2008

March 31-April 4, 2008: Representatives from more than 160 countries begin formal negotiations in Bangkok on a treaty to mitigate climate change.

April 1, 2008: The Olympic Torch relay begins its four-month journey around the world.

April 2, 2008: A *BBC World Service* poll, which surveyed over 17,000 people in 34 countries, indicates Japan is the second most positively viewed country behind Germany.

April 7, 2008: China and New Zealand sign a free trade agreement.

April 8, 2008: U.S. and North Korean negotiators Christopher Hill and Kim Kye-gwan meet in Singapore, narrow differences in their dispute over Pyongyang's declaration of its nuclear activities, and reach a tentative agreement.

April 9, 2008: Parliamentary elections are held in South Korea. President Lee's GNP (Grand National Party) holds 153 seats of the 299 seats (from 128 seats), while the opposition liberal UDP (United Democratic Party) plunges from 141 to 81.

April 10, 2008: The U.S. and China test for the first time a defense "hot line" designed for consultations in times of crisis.

April 11, 2008: The U.S. appoints Scott Marciel as the first U.S. ambassador for ASEAN affairs. He also serves as deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific.

April 11-13, 2008: The annual Boao Forum for Asia is held on Hainan Island.

April 12, 2008: China President Hu Jintao meets Taiwan Vice President-elect Vincent Siew on the sidelines of the Boao Forum, the highest-level contact between the two governments since their post-civil war split in 1949.

April 15-19, 2008: South Korean President Lee Myung-bak visits the U.S. and meets President Bush at Camp David.

April 16, 2008: South Korea names Kim Sook as the Foreign Ministry's special representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs chief negotiator for the Six-Party Talks.

April 17, 2008: Timor Leste President Jose Ramos-Horta returns home amid tight security and cheering crowds after two months of treatment for gunshot wounds sustained in a rebel attack.

April 18, 2008: Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo tells visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi that China should "face up to the reality that the matter [Tibet] has become an international issue and that it should not affect the Olympics."

April 20-21, 2008: South Korean President Lee visits Japan and meets PM Fukuda. They agree to cooperate together with the U.S. on the North Korean nuclear issue, resume discussions on a bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), and hold a trilateral meeting with China within this year.

April 21, 2008: An Indonesian court sentences Abu Dujana, the self-proclaimed leader of the Islamic militant group Jemaah Islamiyah blamed for the 2002 Bali bombings, to 15 years in jail for violating the anti-terror law.

April 21, 2008: Japanese PM Fukuda conveys his intent to raise the issue rising food prices at the G-8 summit scheduled for July in Hokkaido. In letters addressed to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and World Bank President Robert Zoellick, he seeks cooperation from both organizations. Fukuda says that “soaring food prices are posing imminent and serious global challenges” and have brought about social unrest.

April 22-23, 2008: A U.S. team, led by Sung Kim, visits Pyongyang to discuss how to verify any declaration North Korea may make about its nuclear programs.

April 23-24, 2008: Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej visits Malaysia and meets Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. The two agree to work together to fight unrest in Thailand’s south and work to bring peace to the region through economic development.

April 25, 2008: *Xinhua* news agency announces that Chinese government officials would meet “in the coming days” with a private representative of the Dalai Lama.

April 25-27, 2008: Japanese PM Fukuda visits Russia and meets President Vladimir Putin and President-elect Dmitry Medvedev, who takes office in May. They sign an agreement to pursue their countries’ first joint oil field development project in Russia’s eastern Siberian region and discuss the territorial issue of the Russian-held islands off Hokkaido, global warming, and peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

April 25-28, 2008: North Korean Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun visits China and meets Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and State Councilor Dai Bingguo. Yang says it is in everyone’s interests to implement the second phase of the Six-Party Talks in a balanced way and Pak says North Korea wants to “denuclearize the Korean peninsula and would like to work with all relevant parties to fulfill obligations.”

April 26, 2008: Australia announces that it will withdraw 200 troops from East Timor because security has improved.

April 29, 2008: President Bush defends his decision to release details of alleged North Korean links with Syrian nuclear program in order to send a “message” to U.S. foes North Korea and Iran that they could not hide their own nuclear activity.

April 29, 2008: General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee Hu Jintao meets with Lien Chan, honorary chairman of Taiwan's Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), in Beijing.

April 30, 2008: South Korean deputy negotiator for the Six-Party Talks meets Japanese chief negotiator Saiki Akidaka in Tokyo for a working-level discussion.

May 3, 2008: Cyclone *Nargis* strikes Burma, devastating much of the fertile Irrawaddy River delta and the nation's major city, Rangoon.

May 3, 2008: ASEAN trade ministers agree to help each other during the global food crisis and to take measures to maintain the stability of rice prices and boost production.

May 4, 2008: Chinese government representatives meet the Dalai Lama's representatives in Shenzhen. Samdhong Rinpoche, prime minister of the exiled Tibetan government, says the two sides agreed to meet again after discussions "conducted in good atmosphere."

May 6-10, 2008: Chinese President Hu Jintao visits Japan. During the visit Hu and PM Fukuda agree to regular summits aimed at easing tensions between the two countries.

May 7, 2008: Dmitry Medvedev is inaugurated as Russia's third president. The following day he appoints outgoing President Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister.

May 7-12, 2008: Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte travels to Tokyo, Seoul, and Beijing for talks on a range of issues.

May 8, 2008: China and Indonesia reject France's proposal to have UN Security Council put pressure on cyclone-devastated Burma to grant full access to foreign aid workers.

May 8-9, 2008: U.S. State Department representative Sung Kim meets North Korean officials in Pyongyang in what are described by the U.S. State Department spokesperson as "ongoing discussions to rid the North of its nuclear weapons programs." During the meeting, North Korea turns over 18,000 pages of documents related to its plutonium program dating back to 1986.

May 8-21, 2008: *Cobra Gold 2008*, a regularly scheduled joint and combined multinational military exercise, is held in Thailand. Participants include the U.S., Thailand, Singapore, Japan, and Indonesia.

May 9, 2008: Japan's Diet passes a bill that permits military use of outer space for defensive purposes.

May 9-13, 2008: Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo accompanied by a business delegation visits North Korea.

May 10, 2008: Burma's junta opens the polls for a referendum on a new constitution, which it says will pave the way for democratic elections in 2010. Pro-democracy campaigners say the

ballot will be rigged and accuse the generals of trying to prolong their reign. The military delays the referendum in the areas worst-affected by Cyclone *Nargis* until May 24.

May 10, 2008: The UN High Commissioner on Refugees announces the first trucks with relief goods for victims of Cyclone *Nargis* cross the border between Thailand and Burma.

May 12, 2008: U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) Commander Adm. Timothy Keating flies to Burma aboard the first U.S. military aid flight to press for a full-scale international relief operation for victims of Cyclone *Nargis*. At the airport in Rangoon, he meets Burma's top naval officer in the highest-level military contact between the two countries in decades. Burmese officials promise to consider the request.

May 12, 2008: A 7.8 magnitude earthquake with an epicenter located 90 km from the Sichuan provincial capital of Chengdu kills more than 8,700 people.

May 14, 2008: Thailand's Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej says after a visit to Myanmar that the junta leaders would not allow foreign experts into the country for the cyclone relief effort.

May 14-16, 2008: The 8th Russia-China-Indian foreign ministerial meeting is held in Yekaterinburg, Russia. The trilateral meeting is followed by a four-party meeting, adding Brazil's foreign minister on May 16, to review areas of four-party interaction.

May 16, 2008: Rescue teams from Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Russia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong arrive in China's quake-devastated region. This is the first time the Chinese government has accepted foreign professionals for a domestic disaster rescue and relief operation.

May 16, 2008: A U.S. military court sentences a U.S. Marine to at least three years in prison for sexually abusing a 14-year-old Japanese girl, in a case that triggered mass protests in Okinawa.

May 16, 2008: The U.S. announces that it will deliver 500,000 metric tons of food aid to North Korea over the next year. North Korea responds by saying that it is "ready to provide all technical conditions necessary for the food delivery."

May 18-19, 2008: The chief negotiators for the Six-Party Talks from South Korea, the U.S., and Japan hold talks in Washington to discuss how to verify North Korea's declaration of nuclear programs and stockpiles. This is the first time for the group to meet officially since the Korea-U.S.-Japan Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) was suspended in 2003.

May 19, 2008: ASEAN foreign ministers hold an emergency meeting in Singapore to discuss the situation in Myanmar. In a major concession, Myanmar agrees to open its doors to medical teams from all ASEAN countries.

May 19, 2008: World Health Assembly again rejects "Taiwan" observer application.

May 20, 2008: Ma Ying-jeou is inaugurated as president of the Republic of China in Taiwan.

May 22-23, 2008: Thai Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej visits the Philippines and pledges to sell rice to the Philippines for “negotiable” rates.

May 22-25, 2008: UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visits Burma. During his stay, Ban visits the Irrawaddy delta region, meets Gen. Than Shwe, and attends a donor conference.

May 23-24, 2008: President Medvedev visits China on his first trip outside the country since being inaugurated and meets President Hu Jintao. They release a joint statement denouncing U.S. plans to build a global missile defense shield.

May 26, 2008: KMT chairman Wu Poh-hsiung visits China and meets President Hu Jintao. The visit underscores a rapid improvement in ties since the change in government in Taiwan.

May 27, 2008: Assistant Secretary Hill meets Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-gwan in Beijing to discuss a time frame for Pyongyang’s submission of a declaration of its nuclear programs. Hill also holds separate meetings with Chinese Six-Party Talks negotiator Wu Da-wei and Japanese negotiator Saiki Akitaka.

May 27, 2008: Sen. John McCain and Sen. Joseph Lieberman provide insight into the Republican candidate’s Asia policy in a *Wall Street Journal* article titled “Renewing America’s Asia Policy.”

May 27-30, 2008: South Korean President Lee Myung-bak visits Beijing. A presidential official said the summit will trigger the upgrading of bilateral ties to a “strategic cooperative partnership” meaning the two countries “will cooperate more comprehensively and diversely.”

May 28, 2008: The *USS Kitty Hawk* aircraft carrier, stationed in Japan for nearly 10 years, departs Yokosuka to be decommissioned.

May 29-June 4, 2008: U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates visits Guam, Singapore, Thailand, and South Korea in conjunction with his attendance at the seventh annual International Institute for Strategic Studies’ Shangri-La Dialogue. In a speech in Singapore he states that the U.S. is a Pacific nation with an enduring role in Asia and that U.S. alliance relationships are the foundation of the U.S. security presence in the region.

June 1, 2008: Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen makes a brief surprise visit to Zamboanga, Philippines.

June 4, 2008: Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd calls for the creation of an all-inclusive Asia Pacific Community by 2020 to help the region maintain security, foster trade, respond to natural disasters and terrorism, and react more quickly to cope with changes brought about by rapid economic growth.

June 10, 2008: Japan PM Fukuda announces a new climate change policy that sets a goal for cutting greenhouse gas emissions 60 to 80 percent by 2050 and pledges to contribute up to \$1.2 billion to a new multilateral fund that will help developing countries fight global warming.

June 10, 2008: Japanese frigate hits and sinks Taiwan fishing boat near Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands; Taipei and Beijing protest the incident.

June 12, 2008: North Korea Foreign Ministry issues a statement denouncing terrorism and its support of efforts to create a mechanism to counter terrorism and sponsors of terrorism.

June 11-12, 2008: Representatives from Japan and North Korea meet in Beijing to discuss bilateral relations. Following the meeting, North Korea announces that it would reopen an investigation into the past abductions of Japanese citizens and Japan announces that it would lift some sanctions imposed on Pyongyang for its nuclear program.

June 12, 2008: Prime Minister Fukuda meets with Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in Tokyo and the two governments issue a joint statement highlighting the security, strategic, and economic partnership between the two countries.

June 12, 2008: The Six-Party Talks Energy and Economic Assistance Working Group meets in Panmunjom in an effort to speed up delivery of energy assistance to North Korea.

June 14, 2008: The foreign ministers from South Korea, China, and Japan – Yu Myung-hwan, Yang Jiechi, and Masahiko Komura – meet in Japan and agree to build a formal channel for trilateral cooperation.

June 18, 2008: Secretary of State Rice restates U.S. willingness to remove Pyongyang from the terrorist-sponsor list if it submits a full declaration of its nuclear activities.

June 18, 2008: Japan and China announce an agreement to jointly develop a gas field in the East China Sea, resolving a protracted dispute over how to exploit resources in an area where their maritime border remains unsettled.

June 19, 2008: Nuclear negotiators from Japan, South Korea and the U.S. meet in Tokyo and reaffirm the need to push forward the Six-Party Talks to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

June 21, 2008: Japan ratifies a free trade accord with ASEAN. Under the deal, about 90 percent of trade between Japan and ASEAN will be tariff-free within 10 years.

June 21-30, 2008: Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo visits the U.S. and meets President Bush in Washington DC to discuss bilateral cooperation on a broad range of areas including ASEAN, Burma, counterterrorism, defense reform, food security, and regional economic integration.

June 23, 2008: Top nuclear negotiators from the U.S. and South Korea separately meet Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, the Chair of the Six-Party Talks.

June 23-26: Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung pays an official visit to the U.S. and meets President Bush.

June 24-28, 2008: The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer *Sazanami*, carrying earthquake relief supplies, makes a port call in Zhanjiang, becoming the first Japanese warship to visit China since WWII.

June 25, 2008: China reopens Tibet to foreign tourists.

June 26, 2008: North Korea submits the declaration of its nuclear programs to China as the chair of the Six-Party Talks. In response, President Bush announces the lifting of the application of the Trading with the Enemy Act against North Korea, and notifies Congress of his intent to rescind North Korea's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.

June 26, 2008: President Bush signs a National Emergency Declaration, which reinstates many of the TWEA restrictions due to continuing proliferation threat from North Korea.

June 26, 2008: U.S. resumes beef exports to South Korea despite intensified protests. South Korean quarantine inspections restart as well.

June 27, 2008: North Korea destroys the cooling tower of its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon in what is described as a symbolic gesture to show its commitment to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

June 26-30, 2008: Secretary of State Rice visits Japan, South Korea, and China.

June 30, 2008: Violence breaks out in Ulan Bator after the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party wins the majority of seats in Parliamentary elections.

June 30, 2008: The first shipment of U.S. food aid promised in mid-May arrives in North Korea.

June 30, 2008: North Korea and the World Food Program reach agreement on an extensive food aid distribution plan.

July 1, 2008: President Nambaryn Enkhbayar declares a state of emergency in Ulan Bator in response to violence following Parliamentary elections in Mongolia.