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## REVIEW OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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### Challenges to Regional Security in the Asia Pacific

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**L**OOKING AT THE FIRST quarter of 2014, this review highlights four issues with significant implications for the Asia Pacific region in general, and also more specifically Indonesia's security environment. First, the proliferation of the air-defense system and cruise missile have enabled the smaller countries to have better defense ability to the possible external military intervention; hence the future war zone will be more dangerous. Second, Japan Air Self-Defense Force has revised the new Rules of Engagement in treating foreign aircraft that trespass the air zone area, in relation to the dispute over Senkaku/Diaoyu Island in East China Sea, which clearly sends out the signal that Japan will not back down in facing China and will react should the fighter flies across the disputed area. Third, Barack Obama's cancellation of his planned visit to Asia in late 2013 continues to have implications in the United States' commitments in Asia. Fourth, we will look at some latest developments

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in the Taiwan Straits, which, although not a “new” issue in the region, still presents one of the security trouble spots in East Asia.

## **Proliferation of the Air-Defense System and Cruise Missile**

The more sophisticated proliferation of air-defense system and cruise missile has changed strategic environment. The acquisition of these weaponry have enabled the smaller countries to have better defense ability to the possible external military intervention. Russia and China are the main proliferator countries in the capability of cruise missile and air-defense system. The existing international treaties only restrict export on cruise missile but they are not effective in restricting proliferation of air-defense system.

The impacts of cruise missile and air-defense system proliferation are evident in the development of Syria defense capability, and will likely increase the number of countries that want to have the same capability. Between 2011 and 2013 European countries gave varied reactions to the two events of regime changes in the Middle East. European intervention on Libya is contradictory to their approach on conflict situation in Syria. Even though the arguments on this approach are varied and complex, the main difference is on the Syria’s ownership of the most sophisticated cruise missile system but Libya does not have it.

This reflects the strategic and operational impacts of the proliferation of air-defense system and cruise missile technology. The harm caused by proliferation of cutting-edge cruise missile are shown in the previous incidents/events especially in relation to the use of anti-ship cruise missile by the militant group of Hizbullah in Lebanon againsts Israeli’s INS frigate ship in July 2006. This incident confirms the fact the the previous proliferation should not only be focused on ballistic missile, but it should also include the more sophisticated air-defense system and cruise missile.

At the end of Cold War, cutting-edge cruise missile and air-defense system were recovered in the armories in some countries especially Russia, the United States and mostly Western European countries such as French and England. Initially, the proliferation of these two types of weaponry is still very limited due to its main function, as nuclear warhead delivery system, or because its high cost. However, in the beginning of 21st century, the proliferation of cutting edge weaponry system started to expand outside the main operating country and its closest allies. Due

to past political and military dysfunction, these weaponry systems started enter armaments export market, in which the system was initially expected to meet defense or protection needs against the enemy, but then became offensive armaments in new war zone.

The increased proliferation of offensive and defensive missile system to countries that in the past could not access these armaments has created a world where traditional military pressure and tactics are no longer applicable. With the increased effectiveness of weaponry system, the future war zone will be more dangerous and it will represent main protective capacity against possible military intervention from major countries.

## Japan Asserts the Air Zone Arrangement

Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) has revised the new Rules of Engagement (RoE) in treating foreign aircrafts that trespass the air zone area, particularly in relation to the dispute over Senkaku/Diaoyu Island in East China Sea. In the new procedure, every illegal flights that trespass Japan's air zone will be forced to land in Okinawa. Moreover, Japan will detain the pilot of the aircraft and prosecute him/her for air trespassing over Japan's air zone.

This revision of the RoE is part of Japan's government's respond on China's action that determines Air Defense Identification Zone in East China Sea. China's ADIZ has enraged Tokyo because it is contradictory with Japan's ADIZ that has been prevailed initially and covers Senkaku/Diaoyu island. On February 3, 2014, the Japan and US Governments asserted that China's ADIZ would not affect their military operation, which indicated the closeness of the two countries in coordination for this issue.

The New RoE and Japan-America's attitude clearly sends out the signal that Japan will not back down in facing China and will react should the fighter flies across the disputed area. This RoE is also a follow up on the Japanese Ministry of Defence's Publication, which shows that JASDF fighters have responded the presence of Chinese fighter in the area for 138 times in the last three months of 2013. This figure is a significant increase compared to the previous months of July-September and April-June 2013 where there were only 80 and 69 intercepts in consecutive order. There are other flights that were identified by the Chinese coast guard aircraft to have cross Senkaku/Diaoyu Island though they are small in number and



are not armed.

There is a small possibility for military confrontation between China and Japan over the disputed island, but with the application of the new RoE by the Japanese Airforce, the risk of miscalculation and incidents involving fighters is increasing. Conflict might escalated quickly, which might cause prohibition of civilian flights crossing the China ADIZ area or the tension around the maritime area and closure of air zone around it.

## **Challenges on US' Pivot Commitment in East Asia**

Only a month after being reelected as the US President on November 2012, President Barack Obama visited some countries in South East Asia. The visit ended in Myanmar to support domestic reform and, implicitly, promote the distant diplomatic relation between the country and China. This visit was widely interpreted as a symbol of a shift in the United States' foreign policy from its focus on Afghanistan and Iraq during the first period of his leadership (2009-2014).

However, on October 2013, President Obama cancelled his visit to four Asian Countries (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines), including his plan to attend a high-level meeting with the regional leaders. This situation was triggered by a domestic political problem, with the inability of Congress in approving the federal state's budget. As a consequence, the U.S. allies and partners in Asia were left questioning whether the political dysfunction in Washington and budget deficit will obstruct its involvement in East Asia, as previously declared by President Obama a year before.

Developments in the Middle East continue to be the factors that affect President Obama's foreign policy on East Asia in the remaining period of his leadership. Amidst the increased suspicion between Washington and Beijing, the nuclear negotiation with Iran and ongoing civilian conflict in Syria will definitely destroy the U.S. strategic commitment in East Asia.

There are two main challenges on the U.S. pivot policy that are currently being observed by allies at the regional level. First is the current negotiation on Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), a free trade area that will reduce trade obstructions and regulation that will harmonize Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, US, and Vietnam. TPP is a strategic center of Washington's commitment in East Asia that will place a basic foundation in maintaining US presence in the

region by economically bind Asian countries and releasing their allies to take long-term option between the China market and US protection.

TPP negotiation process has exceeded the agreed schedule. Obama's decision to postpone his visit to Asian countries in 2013, which was meant to encourage all parties involves to complete and sign the negotiation at the end of that year, has ended the important momentum that was needed to meet the purpose. U.S. Government has also failed in anticipating expanded domestic opposition against the TPP agreement, as the confidentiality of TPP negotiation has become a major concern among both the Republican and Democrat.

The second problem that will obstruct Obama's commitment is the increased tension between China and Japan over Senkaku/Diaoyu Island in East China Sea. The two countries have claimed their sovereignty over the island for more than 40 years, but the dispute has escalated dramatically on September 2012 when Tokyo change the status of the three islands from private ownership.

Although the military confrontation is less likely to happen, the mishandling of crisis by Washington may enrage Japan or even worsen their bilateral relationship with China. The U.S. ambiguous attitude and careful strategic measures in responding the development was caused by the dilemma they are facing between meeting their commitment to become primary ally to Asian countries and possibility of getting into conflict with major power country in the area, and this is not favored by any party.

On one hand, Obama's administration has repeatedly asserted that even though Washington does not determine their position on who has sovereignty over Senkaku/Diaoyu Island, Japanese government's control in the area requires Washington to support Tokyo in armed conflict situation provoked by China. With the possibility of aggression from China, the U.S. warned Beijing for not taking unilateral measure that will disturb Japanese government's control over the disputed island.

On the other hand, Obama's administration does not want to encourage Tokyo to take measures that may drag the US into possible conflict over the island that does not have any strategic value for its country. Washington also realizes that even though they continuously asserting that their pivot was not meant to promote hostility with Beijing, China considers American 'rebalancing' policy is an effort to limit their influence in the region.

Obama's administration response on China's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), which covers East China Sea (including the Senkaku/Diaoyu Island) illustrates the problem of diplomatic balancing act. The

U.S. did show their objection by deploying two of their B-52 over ADIZ without notifying the other side. The Vice President Joe Biden also provoke the situation by stating insulting statement on the island during his visit to Beijing in the beginning of December. However unlike Japan, the U.S. suggests civilian flights to identify themselves before flying across the ADIZ to follow China's regulation, and ask all parties to hold their actions.

This calm attitude, following Obama's cancelled visit to East Asian Countries has made the policy maker in Japan wonder whether Washington's commitment on pivot is just a rhetoric and it's not substantial. Even prior to the last incident on July 2013, the Japanese government published their White Book of Defence, which questions U.S. commitment to increase its presence in the region. Tokyo's doubt over Washington's commitment that has triggered Japanese independent defense posture is now worsened by the nationalists who are currently dominating Japanese government's structure. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his cabinet members even support the review of Japanese Pacific Constitution.

With such challenges, the Obama's administration seems to have limited options with regards to their policy and commitment in Asia. The U.S. Government hopes that the subsided conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq will give strategic opportunity to focus its attention to East Asia Region.

However many recent incidents show that the development in the Middle East may take the worst turn and will defer U.S. attention from East Asia.

## **Stability Amidst the Future Uncertainty at the Taiwan Strait**

Beijing and Taipei's relationship seemed to have been improved in the last few years. There has been 19 signed bilateral agreement since 2008 including Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement, which was signed on June 29, 2010. Similar agreements were expected to be made before Ma's resignation in 2014. Taiwanese tourism industry has also opened its door to China, which contributes the largest number of tourists in that island. Both countries began to have more regular cooperation ranging from cultural cooperation to Track II diplomatic exchange, which includes exchange of academics, researchers and officials from both countries.

Nevertheless, the annual report issued by Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense on October 8, 2013 gave different perspective, which



showed that China remains to be the biggest threat for Taiwan's national security, and Taiwan is still trying to increase their main capacity to ensure they can counter military invasion in 2020. In reality, the Chinese government has never ruled out military option in invading Taiwan, which is considered as the last province for reunification even when they have to employ military force in doing so.

There are two main conditions that would determine whether China will invade Taiwan in 2020 or not. First, Beijing still acknowledges the relationship built at the Taiwan Strait and this relation is considered to be beneficial for peaceful unification. The outcome of Presidential and Legislative Election in Taiwan in 2016 will become an important determining factor whether the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) will continue to be in ruling in that island. In the past, DPP represented the biggest obstacle for peaceful unification by the Chinese government through economic, social and cultural integration. If this happens, Beijing will most likely adopt coercive measures including military intervention. After the DPP wins the election, there might be a drastic change in the relationship between two countries at the Taiwan Strait. Similar scenario might also happen should the future Kuomintang government receives serious challenge from DPP that dominate the legislative agency.

The second condition is the occurrence of political crisis and chaos in Taiwan, which will trigger Chinese military intervention in order to restore stability in the island that is considered to be part of its national sovereignty. Though this condition may not happen in the near future, Beijing's pressure against KMT government to be involved in political dialogue process tends to create serious social and political frictions in Taiwan. Protests against the cooperation agreement proposed by Chinese government have been a routine since 2012.

Other factor is the level and coverage of the US 'rebalancing' policy in East Asia, in which the projection is still unclear, and moreover Washington faces financial difficulties and geopolitical priorities. Even when the 'pivot' is realized, the impact on Taiwan's national security will depend on whether the island still considers itself as part of the US alliance system in East Asia. This condition is unclear considering Washington is still ambiguous on the matter. If the attack against Taiwan triggers the US respond to defend the island in accordance to the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), this will hamper Chinese military ambition. It is undeniable that such attitude will worsen US and Chinese relationship.

On the contrary, if the US states that Taiwan is no longer part of

the area with security assurance by ruling out Taiwan in the pivot or by ending armaments selling to the island, the Chinese Government will have different kind of strategy. The possibility of Beijing to militarily invade the area is higher considering the low cost of war. Beijing has long dreamt of reunifying Taiwan even if they have to employ military force. In the next decade, the Chinese government will try to increase its armed forces capacity to anticipate military invasion option against Taiwan.

Economic integration can indeed reduce armed conflict risk, but there is no assurance that political actor will consistently employ rational strategy in dealing with military force option. As for Chinese main interest, reunification of Taiwan is an emotional issue to some people at the internal communist party and military in the country. Moreover, as a geographical challenge to the military capacity projection and reminiscence of past foreign insult against China, Taiwan will always employ emotive effect from its political elite and general public in the country.