
REVIEW OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Turmoil, Setbacks, and Progress

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THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE CONTINUES to a mixture of setbacks and progress. The Middle East continues its descend into more conflict and chaos with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Territorial disputes and geopolitical tensions remain the concerns for the Asia-Pacific. Meanwhile, although it suffered a devastating setback in Thailand with a second *coup d'état* in the last decade, a glimmer of hope for democracy in Southeast Asia manifested in the free and fair conduct of elections in Indonesia this year.

Turmoil in the Middle East

In recent months, the Middle East has been thrust into international attention once again for the turmoil that is taking place in the region. The resurgence of the decades long Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as the rise of the ISIS, have taken the spotlight and have become salient

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issues within Indonesia. It is inevitable to question why these conflicts have become a hot-button topic for which Indonesians are willing to protest and hold rallies for, in the case of the conflict between Israel and Palestine; or take up arms in a foreign country, as some Indonesians have joined ISIS. A closer look in both the recent clashes between Israel and Hamas (who currently runs the Gaza Strip and is also deemed a terrorist organization by the United States and Israel), as well as the rise of ISIS will reveal that it is the plight of the Muslim people that is causing these two different situations to become relevant within Indonesia.

The decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been marked with many casualties and has caused both sides in the conflict to severely distrust one another. The recent Israeli incursion into Gaza and the rocket fire from Gaza show that this time is no exception. The recent conflict started as Hamas allegedly kidnapped three teenagers, though Hamas claims to not have anything to do with them. Things then escalated really quickly as on 26 June 2014 Israel demolished the homes of the suspects. On 28 June, Hamas carried out rocket strikes from the Gaza Strip against Israel. The bodies of the kidnapped boys were then found under rocks in an open field on 30 June. Soon after Israel launched 34 attacks on Hamas and on Gaza. As Hamas rockets continued, Israel continued the air strikes but also added a ground offensive. The conflict has now continued for several weeks with two failed cease-fire attempts.¹ The disproportionate response to the kidnappings on the part of Israel and the resulting casualties from that response is what pushed this current clash into international attention causing many Indonesians to condemn Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip. As Palestine and the Gaza Strip are majority Muslim, Indonesians see a special connection with those in the line of Israel's fire, one that is marked by the commonality in religion. Hence, Indonesians feel obligated to stand up for those they believe are fellow Muslims, doing anything in their power to voice their anger for the lives lost in the conflict.

In many ways, the sentiment shown in the response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been taken to an extreme, as those who see sympathy for the plight of the Muslim people within Indonesia have sympathized with ISIS. Though the number has been relatively small, many are worried that the success of ISIS will cause a resurgence of militant Islam within Indonesia. With its origins coming in the wake of the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, ISIS has flourished in the

1 Hayes Brown, "Timeline: The Month That Brought Gaza Back To The Breaking Point," *Think Progress*, 17 July 2014, <http://thinkprogress.org/world/2014/07/14/3459100/timeline-how-war-returned-to-gaza/>

Levant. ISIS continues to gain ground in Iraq and Syria and now has caused the U.S. to once again become involved in Iraq. This continued success has caught the eye of many jihadists within Indonesia as many have already pledged support for ISIS.² The Indonesian government does see this success as a threat to the progress they have made against groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah. The situation has caused government officials, and even President Yudhoyono, as well as civil society groups like Muhammadiyah to come out and vocally condemn ISIS. It is the connection that some Indonesians have with those who they feel share religious commonalities with that has made ISIS and the situation in the Levant a pressing issue within Indonesia. As a result, the recent turmoil in the Middle East, through the Israel-Palestine conflict and through the emergence of ISIS, have caught the attention of the Muslim Indonesian public becoming hot button issues within Indonesia.

Tensions in Asia-Pacific

Security concerns continue to define geopolitical events in Asia-Pacific. In the South China Sea, China's unilateral actions and rising assertiveness in the disputed territory have further soured its relations with Vietnam. In the East China Sea, Japan embarked on the normalization of its military and further strengthened its relationship with the U.S.

In the South China Sea, on 1 May 2014, China placed an oilrig in the disputed waters, close to the Paracel Islands, claimed by both Vietnam and itself.³ Subsequently, Vietnamese naval vessels came to the area and attempted to prevent the placement. This prompted Chinese vessels to 'intentionally ram' Vietnamese ones, according to Vietnamese officials. On 26 May, Vietnam even released a video of an alleged Chinese vessel 'plowing into one of its fishing ships'.⁴ As of 1 June, 24 Vietnamese boats have been damaged and 12 fisheries officers have been hurt. On the other hand, Chinese Foreign Ministry claimed that it was Vietnamese ships that were attacking and China was on the defensive.⁵

² Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters, "Backgrounders: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 8 August 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state-iraq-syria/p14811>

³ "Vietnam and China ships 'collide in South China Sea,'" *BBC News*, 7 May 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27293314>

⁴ "Vietnam Says China Still Ramming Boats, Airs Sinking Video," *Bloomberg News*, 7 June 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-06-05/vietnam-says-china-still-harassing-boats-shows-video-of-sinking.html>

⁵ Ibid.

As if the fact that the incident at sea was the most serious between the two in years was not enough, the conflict escalated into mainland Vietnam. On 13 May anti-China riots broke out in the southern parts of Vietnam, mainly in their industrial parks.⁶ The demonstrations initially numbered around 20,000, although they have grown in numbers as they spread. The firstly peaceful demonstrators quickly turned violent and arson, torching factories deemed to be owned by Chinese enterprises. However, the protesters burned and looted factories owned by Taiwanese and South Korean enterprises, possibly by mistake. As of 15 May, at least 21 people were dead and more than 600 Chinese nationals have left the country out of fear.⁷ In the aftermath, around 600 people were arrested for 'looting and inciting the crowd'.⁸

Officials from Beijing and Hanoi have condemned the protests. Washington has also urged both sides to exercise restraint with White House spokesman Jay Carney stating this sort of dispute needs "to be resolved through dialogue, not through intimidation."⁹ For its part, China has removed the oil rig that triggered the dispute in the first place on July.¹⁰ Yet, geopolitical events seem to move not in China's favor.

Although already traditional allies, the Philippines and the U.S. further deepened their relationship. On 28 April 2014, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) was signed by President Barack Obama and President Benigno Aquino III.¹¹ A complement to the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951, the 10-year EDCA provisioned the rotation of U.S. military officers and assets on the agreed locations of Filipino territory.¹² It was seen as a clear move by Washington and Manila in signaling their posture against increased Chinese assertiveness in the region. China wasted no time

6 Emily Rauhala, "Vietnam Protesters Torch Factories in Anti-China Protests," *Time*, 14 May 2014, <http://time.com/98667/vietnam-factories-arson-china-protest/>

7 "Up to 21 dead, doctor says, as anti-China riots spread in Vietnam," *Reuters*, 15 May 2014, accessed on August 22, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/15/us-vietnam-china-riots-casualties-idUSBREA4E03Y20140515>

8 *Ibid.*

9 Per Liljas, "Anti-China Riots in Vietnam Leave at Least 21 Dead," *Time*, 15 May 2014, <http://time.com/100492/vietnam-anti-china-riots-21-dead/>

10 "Beijing removes South China Sea oil rig," *The Guardian*, 16 July 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/16/beijing-removes-south-china-sea-oil-rig>

11 Joel Guinto, et al, "U.S., Philippines Sign Defense Pact Amid China Tensions," *Bloomberg News*, 28 April 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-04-27/philippines-to-sign-defense-deal-with-u-s-amid-china-tensions.html>

12 "Document: Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the Philippines and the United States," *The Government of Philippines*, 29 April 2014, <http://www.gov.ph/2014/04/29/document-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement/>

in condemning this move. The next day after the agreement was signed, an editorial in the state-run *China Daily* lambasted President Obama's trip in Asia, where the EDCA was signed for the Filipino leg of the tour. It stated, "With Obama reassuring the U.S. allies of protection in any conflict with China, it is now clear that Washington is no longer bothering to conceal its attempt to contain China's influence in the region."¹³

In the East China Sea, China's increasing assertiveness has resulted in a more risky security situation, especially in relations with Japan. Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan began its effort to legislate the normalization of its military posture. On June 2014, the ruling coalition in the Diet pushed on the issue of collective self-defense in the reinterpretation of Article 9 of the country's Constitution. If agreed upon, this would allow Japan to conduct a military action under an allied action if "an attack on a country with a close relationship with Japan" would "clearly cast a danger on Japan."¹⁴ Due to a strong pacifist tradition, Japanese public opposed the move with 55% of those polled opposed the reinterpretation.¹⁵ Chinese official news outlets have called the move "a dangerous path... that essentially guts Japan's pacifist charter."¹⁶ Nonetheless, the legislation is expected to be finalized and agreed upon soon.

In the same trip in which he signed the EDCA with the Philippines, President Obama also paid visit to Japan. In this visit, President Obama issued his strongest support for Japan in the latter's disputed with China. He stated that the Senkaku Islands, a Japanese administered territory under dispute with China—who called it the Diaoyu Islands, fell within the scope of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.¹⁷ This means that in the event of a Chinese invasion of the territory, the U.S. is treaty-obliged to come to the aid of Japan.

13 Agence France-Presse, "Obama ignites Chinese anger as he warns against force," *Philippines Daily Inquirer*, 29 April 2014, <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/103135/obama-ignites-chinese-anger-as-he-warns-against-force>

14 Clint Richards, "Timing is Everything: Abe's Playbook for Military Normalization," *The Diplomat*, 1 July 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/timing-is-everything-abes-playbook-for-military-normalization/>

15 "55% now opposed to Abe's collective self-defense push, survey says," *Japan Times*, 22 June 2014, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/06/22/national/politics-diplomacy/opposition-collective-defense-rises/#.U7jpnECrnm6>

U7jpnECrnm6

16 Li Wei, "The end rather than the means," *China Daily*, 1 July 2014, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2014-07/01/content_17628467.htm

17 Ankit Panda, "Obama: Senkakus Covered Under US-Japan Security Treaty," *The Diplomat*, 24 April 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/obama-senkakus-covered-under-us-japan-security-treaty/>

Democracy in Southeast Asia

Democracy took opposing turns for two countries in the region. Following six months of political crisis, Thailand experience another *coup d'état* led by its military junta, its second one in ten years. On the other hand, Indonesia undertook its election without any major violence taking place, electing the governor of its capital to the highest political appointment.

The recent ouster of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra went back to the political instability in Thailand since 2013. Anti-government protests erupted in November that year, led by Suthep Thaugsuban through the People's Democratic Reform Committee. He stated that the immediate goal of his protests was "to paralyze the Yingluck government" and the removal of Thaksin Shinawatra's influence in Thai politics.¹⁸ Protesters deemed that the former prime minister and Yingluck's brothers to be a corrupt leader and a threat to democracy in Thailand. He enjoyed support, however, from the poorer segments of Thai society in the north—in contrast to his critics who mainly came from the urban population—due to his social and economic policies and parties affiliated with him have won election since 2001.¹⁹ The pro-Thaksin factions fought back with the establishment of the "red shirt" movement. This was in contrast with the anti-government groups who associated themselves with the color yellow. Several events intermittently colored the political crisis, including the introduction of the amnesty bill to pardon various politicians including Thaksin—which triggered the "yellow shirt" protests—and the Constitutional Court decision to reject the ruling Peu Thai party—led by Prime Minister Yingluck.²⁰ The crisis reached an alarming level of instability when the Court ordered Prime Minister Yingluck to step down, finding her guilty for abusing power in the national security Chief Thawil Pliensri back in 2011.²¹ It culminated with the Royal Thai Army officially taking over, declaring martial law on 20 May 2014 and establishing a military junta called the National Peace and Order Maintaining Council (NPOMC) on 22 May. The military also arrested former Prime Minister

18 "Suthep declares people's revolt," *Bangkok Post*, 30 November 2013, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/politics/382361/suthep-declares-people-revolt>

19 "You go your way, I'll go mine," *The Economist*, 25 January 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21594989-thailands-very-unity-now-under-threat-you-go-your-way-ill-go-mine>

20 "Thailand Constitutional Court rejects senate amendments," *BBC News*, 20 November 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24997184>

21 "Thailand court ousts PM Yingluck Shinawatra," *BBC News*, 7 May 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27292633>

Yingluck with various political leaders and cabinet members.²² Although violence has ceased, there is no end in sight for the political crisis gripping the second largest economy in Southeast Asia.

Meanwhile, the region's largest economy organized its legislative and presidential elections in 2014. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia - Perjuangan, hereafter abbreviated as PDI-P) won the most seats in the 2014 Indonesian legislative election, winning 18.95% of the votes.²³ Although the party did not pass the 25% threshold in order to be able to nominate its own presidential candidate, this victory represented an important milestone for the young democracy. It was the first time an opposition party returned to power only through electoral means, further cementing the electoral process. The milestones did not stop there in this year's Indonesian elections. Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, the popular governor of Jakarta, won the July presidential election, taking 53.08% of the votes.²⁴ The former mayor of Surakarta beat Prabowo Subianto, a former Lieutenant General with New Order links. During the race, Prabowo allegedly utilized various methods to discredit his opponent, including black campaigns invoking false allegations of Jokowi's religion and ethnicity.²⁵ These methods managed to erode Jokowi's lead in the run-up to the voting in July. Apparently, they were not enough, however, as he only won 46.92% of the votes. Prabowo later challenged the result in the Constitutional Court, although his challenge was dismissed, confirming Jokowi's victory.²⁶

Multilateral Summits

The last quarter of 2014 saw three regional multilateral meetings, packed into mid-November. The first was the Asia-Pacific Economic

22 "Former Thai PM Shinawatra arrested by military rulers," *Thailand News*, 23 May 2014, <http://www.thailandnews.net/index.php/sid/222273049/scat/7eb51d3138244bed/ht/Former-Thai-PM-Shinawatra-arrested-by-military-rulers>

23 Zakir Hussain, "Indonesia elections: PDI-P tops final tally with 18.95% of the votes," *Straits Times*, May 10, 2014, <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/asia/south-east-asia/story/indonesia-elections-pdi-p-tops-final-tally-1895-votes-20140510>

24 Markus Junianto Sihaloho, et al, "Jokowi-Kalla win Indonesia Presidential Election as KPU competes tally," *The Jakarta Globe*, 20 July 2014, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/news/jokowi-kalla-win-presidential-election-kpu-completes-tally/>

25 Peter Alford, "'Black campaign' colours Prabowo run," *The Australian*, 26 June 2014, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/black-campaign-colours-prabowo-run/story-c6frg6so-1226966879819>

26 Ina Parlina, "Prabowo loses as court rules in favor of KPU," *The Jakarta Post*, 22 August 2014, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/08/22/prabowo-loses-court-rules-favor-kpu.html>

Cooperation (APEC) Summit, held in Beijing, China on 10-12 November. It was the first international summit attended by the Indonesian President Joko Widodo in his capacity as Indonesia's newly elected president. At the APEC CEO Summit, he invited multinational businesses to invest in Indonesia, especially in the country's infrastructure to fulfill its development needs. In this summit, China showcased its trade diplomacy by lending its support the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), although not all participants were as eager as the host in the initiative.²⁷ The FTAAP is a proposal for a free trade area encompassing all APEC members in order to overcome the "noodle bowl" effects resulting from various agreements in the region. On November 11, South Korea and China also have reached a de facto deal on a free trade agreement that has started since 2012.²⁸

Yet, the biggest achievements of this year's APEC are the three bilateral agreements between China and the US: 1) a military accord to prevent clashes between Chinese and American planes and warships; 2) a mutual understanding to slash tariffs on technology products; and 3) a joint plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.²⁹ The last is the most significant as it was the first time China ever agreed to a deal on curbing its greenhouse gas emissions. Beijing agreed to peak its carbon emissions by 2030 and attempted to achieve 20% of its energy mix from sources that do not produce emissions. For its part, Washington agreed to cut its 2005 carbon emissions by 26% to 28% by 2025. This landmark bilateral agreement would lay an important groundwork for next year's Climate Change Conference at Paris.

The second was the East Asia Summit. The Ninth Summit was held in Naypyidaw, Myanmar on 12-13 November. In this summit, President Widodo outlined the vision of Indonesia as a maritime fulcrum, a power between the Indian and Pacific Ocean. Indonesia would continue to strive for the two oceans to remain peaceful and safe for global commerce, instead of transforming into battlegrounds for natural resources, territorial disputes, and maritime supremacy.³⁰ This vision rests upon five pillars: 1) rebuild Indonesia's maritime culture; 2) maintaining and managing

27 Mireya Solis, "China flexes its muscle at APEC with the revival of FTAAP," *East Asia Forum*, 23 November 2014, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/11/23/china-flexes-its-muscles-at-apec-with-the-revival-of-ftaap/>

28 "S. Korea, China strike balance in FTA talks: gov't," *Yonhap News Agency*, 11 November 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/business/2014/11/10/2/0502000000AEN20141110005400320E.html>

29 Mark Landler, "U.S. and China Reach Climate Change Accord After Months of Talks," *New York Times*, 11 November 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/12/world/asia/china-us-xi-obama-apec.html?_r=0

30 Rendi A. Witular, "Presenting maritime doctrine," *The Jakarta Post*, 14 November 2014, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/11/14/presenting-maritime-doctrine.html>

marine resources focused on sovereignty over sea-based food products; 3) prioritizing maritime infrastructure and connectivity development; 4) ending sources of conflict at sea through maritime diplomacy; and 5) building its maritime defense power. There were also calls for the host to continue its political reforms. President Barack Obama especially made this call in his meeting with the Myanmar President Thein Sein. He expressed hope that Myanmar would continue the reform process to shed decades of military dictatorship and settle disputes with ethnic minorities.³¹

The third subsequent meeting is the G-20 Summit. As with the East Asia Summit, this year's G-20 meeting was also the ninth. It was held in Brisbane, Australia on 15-16 November. The main agenda was economic growth after the global financial crisis. European Union (EU) officials stressed the importance of coordination of growth strategies among major countries and finalization of agreements on core financial reforms, tax, and anti-corruption.³² Climate change was originally on the agenda, but the host, as expressed by its Prime Minister Tony Abbot, believed that such agenda would distract from economic growth.³³ All heads of government of G20 members were in attendance, save for Argentina and Russia, represented by their Finance Minister and Prime Minister, respectively.

Concluding Notes

Navigating global politics is anything but challenging. As if the region needed more conflicts, the rise of ISIS continues to cement the Middle East as the world's premier region of conflict. Although not in the same scale, the region of Asia-Pacific also experienced its share disputes and tensions in the latter quarters of this year. The state of democracy represents a mixed picture with Thailand witnessing the military takeover of civilian government and Indonesia successfully conducting its elections. Breakthroughs also took place in economic diplomacy at Asia-Pacific despite the above-mentioned tensions.

31 Mark Landler and Thomas Fuller. "Obama Prods Myanmar Back Toward Democracy," *New York Times*, 13 November 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/14/world/asia/obama-will-try-to-push-myanmar-back-on-the-path-toward-democracy.html>

32 "The EU at the G20 summit in Brisbane: Joint Letter of Presidents Barroso and Van Rompuy," *European Commission*, 21 October 2014, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-600_en.htm

33 "EU 'unhappy' climate change is off G20 agenda," *The Australian*, 3 April 2014, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/climate/eu-unhappy-climate-change-is-off-g20-agenda/story-e6frg6xf-1226873127864>