Revisiting U.S. Policy toward Post-Coup Thailand

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At a time when U.S. relations with most countries in Southeast Asia are warming, the United States’ ties with its oldest partner in the region are a critical outlier. Thailand-U.S. relations have been in a deep freeze for the past 13 months since Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha ousted an elected civilian government following six months of disruptive political protests and installed a military junta.

Thailand is going through a historic political transition that has existential stakes for Thais. Meanwhile, much of the rest of Southeast Asia is seeing a nuanced shift away from centrally controlled political models as its fast-expanding and relatively young middle class, empowered by strong economic growth and technological innovations, has begun to assert itself and press governments for more transparency, access to decisionmaking, and stronger institutions.

ASEAN, of which Thailand is a founding member, is central to the U.S. rebalance to Asia. In responding to Thailand’s political crisis, the United States must walk a tightrope, balancing consistency in U.S. foreign-policy tenets supporting democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression with an unwavering focus on a strategic compass that defines U.S. interests as sustaining a strong and unified ASEAN as the core of an emerging regional economic and security architecture.
Southeast Asia’s political landscape is changing and Thailand, which has faced a decades-long cycle of attempts at democracy shattered by coups and military juntas, will eventually rejoin the regional trend of broader participation in political decisionmaking and strengthening rule of law and institutions.

In the last two decades, U.S. policies toward Thailand have been perceived by Thais as wrong-footed in at least two instances: Washington’s response to the Asian financial crisis that began in 1997 and its reaction to the previous coup in 2006. In both cases, Thais complained that U.S. policy was prescriptive, paternalistic, and did not take into account the real situation on the ground. Now there is growing concern about the United States in Thailand and creeping anti-U.S. sentiment. Policymaking certainly should not be a popularity contest, but the United States risks losing serious geopolitical ground if it fails to manage this difficult chapter in Thailand’s political evolution.

For now, the Thai military has assumed political control to ensure it manages the royal succession beyond ailing 87-year-old King Bhumipol Adulyadej, whenever that takes place. At least some observers believe it is unlikely that Thailand will have real elections until the succession takes place, which could be several years from now.

The draft constitution currently being circulated falls short of what most observers would consider a minimally credible democracy. Senior leaders in political parties on both sides of the divide have been critical of the draft.

The military keeps pushing back the date for new elections. Last month officials said the elections that had been expected early next year would not take place before August or September 2016. The military has said the elections were pushed back to allow for a referendum, but it has given no indication of what would happen if the draft constitution was rejected.

In this context, what should the U.S. government do?

- For starters, the Senate should quickly confirm ambassador-designate Glyn Davies, a talented career diplomat who was nominated in April. The ambassador slot in Bangkok has been open for nearly a year, and Thais can be forgiven for assuming this is a diplomatic signal. The embassy in Bangkok needs its senior-most slot filled to demonstrate
that the United States takes Thailand seriously even if it disagrees with its politics.

- Separate from the ambassador, the administration should assign to Thailand a high-level special envoy, a leader with long experience in Asia and high-level foreign policy and security standing who can talk credibly to Thailand’s military leaders. The envoy should travel frequently to Thailand to consult with various stakeholders, including the military, to deepen understanding of U.S. concerns and listen to the perspectives of the key players in the political drama that has engulfed the kingdom.

- The U.S. government should continue to urge the Thai military to restore democracy quickly and press the junta to rescind the orders restricting freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and other civil and political rights, end the use of military tribunals to try civilians, and amend or revoke penal code article 112 on lèse-majesté and release those convicted under that article.

- Thailand’s relations with China have long been strong and it seems that Beijing incrementally steps up its ties with the Thai military every time Washington pulls back. Washington needs to find ways to demonstrate that it remains a friend of Thailand and not turn its back on the country when politics enter a rough patch. One idea would be to establish a private eminent persons’ group of senior former U.S. foreign-policy officials, experts, and business leaders that could meet influential Thais on a regular basis to discuss the future of Thai-U.S. relations, say, five years down the road.

- If the military delays the elections beyond September 2016, Washington should consider other alternatives. The embassy in Bangkok is one of the largest in the region and serves as the base for a raft of U.S. activities in Southeast Asia, including as the regional headquarters for narcotics interdiction, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Thailand prides itself on serving as this regional hub, but if the return to democracy is delayed indefinitely, Washington could demonstrate its ongoing concern by beginning to move some of these regional services and offices to neighboring countries.
Once Thailand has successfully returned to democracy, Washington should move quickly with Bangkok to get relations, including military and security ties, back on a cooperative track.

*This commentary is adapted from Murray Hiebert’s June 11, 2015, testimony on Thailand at a hearing of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Hiebert’s testimony was entitled “Retreat or Revival: A Status Report on Democracy in Asia.”*
Naw Zipporah Sein, vice president of the Karen National Union. She was appointed head of the new ethnic negotiating committee, which will renegotiate the draft cease-fire agreement with the government in the coming weeks, following a summit in Karen State in early June. https://www.flickr.com/photos/burmapartnership/4458885697/

MYANMAR

- **Fighting breaks out in Kachin, Kokang; government concerned about new negotiating team.** A representative of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) on June 17 told Radio Free Asia that heavy fighting resumed between the KIA and the Myanmar military in northern Kachin State on June 16. Fighting also erupted in the Kokang region in northern Shan State on June 12 and 13, as government troops continued to attack Kokang rebels despite the group's earlier announcement of a unilateral cease-fire. In another development that adds uncertainty to the nationwide cease-fire process, a senior official with the Myanmar Peace Center on June 15 said that members of the newly appointed ethnic peace negotiating committee are “hardliners” and it will take time for the government to build rapport with them.

- **Government issues “green cards” to verify citizenship for some Rohingya Muslims.** The Immigration and Population Department of Rakhine State on June 5 began issuing “green cards” to Rohingya Muslims in 14 townships across the state who wish to go through a verification process for citizenship, according to a June 18 Myanmar Times report. Only those who have turned in their white cards, or temporary identification papers, to the government can receive green cards. Authorities have collected about 400,000 white cards from Rohingya since March.

- **Parliamentary committee reviews draft constitutional reforms to go into effect after elections.** The ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party on June 10 submitted a draft constitutional reform bill to the parliament’s Joint Bill Committee for its review. The bill suggests reducing the threshold vote needed to amend the constitution from 75 percent to 70 percent, which matters because 25 percent of parliamentarians are appointed by the military. The draft bill also requires presidential candidates to be elected lawmakers and “well-acquainted” with defense affairs. The committee has said that the bill, if passed, will not go into effect until after this November’s elections.

- **OPIC approves $250 million to finance telecommunications towers.** The U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) on June 11 announced that it has approved a $250 million loan for Apollo Towers, a subsidiary of U.S.-based Tillman Global Holdings, to build a network of 2,500 telecommunications towers in Myanmar. OPIC hopes that its support will help Myanmar achieve its goal of reaching a 75 percent mobile access rate by 2016. Philippe Luxcey, who is chief executive officer of Apollo
Towers, called the loan the largest direct U.S. government financing deal in Myanmar to date.

- **Amnesty report says government intimidates media.** Amnesty International on June 17 released a report that accuses the Myanmar government of using threats of harassment and imprisonment to intimidate journalists ahead of the national elections in November. The report said that at least 10 media workers are currently in jail as the government has increasingly restricted freedom of expression. Minister of Information Ye Htut responded by saying that media freedom in Myanmar should be based on the country’s fragile social and political factors.

- **India conducts insurgency raid across border with Myanmar.** Indian special forces on June 9 crossed into two of Myanmar’s northeastern states during a counterinsurgency raid, killing a total of 18 militants, which the Indian government said signals Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s readiness to carry out strikes against militants beyond India’s borders. Naypyidaw officially denied that the operation took place on Myanmar’s side of the border. Indian national security adviser Ajit Kumar Doval visited Myanmar from June 16 to 17 in what many described as an attempt to soothe tensions with Myanmar’s leaders.

**MALAYSIA**

- **Opposition coalition abolished as DAP, PAS sever ties.** Democratic Action Party (DAP) secretary-general Lim Guan Eng on June 16 said his party accepted an earlier motion by the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) to sever ties between the two parties. The split effectively dissolved Malaysia’s opposition coalition, which consisted of DAP, PAS, and the People’s Justice Party. Relations between the former coalition partners had deteriorated since PAS introduced *hudud*, the Islamic penal code, in Kelantan State over DAP’s objections. The coalition won control of three Malaysian states and the popular vote in the 2013 general elections.

- **Najib responds to Mahathir’s attacks; Nazir rumored to be founding new political organization.** Prime Minister Najib Razak on June 12 said on his blog that allegations made against him by former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad regarding missing funds at state investment firm 1Malaysia Development Bhd were “false and motivated by self-interest.” Meanwhile Najib’s brother, Nazir Razak, has reportedly been working to set up a new nongovernmental organization to bring together Malaysians of different ethnic, religious, and political persuasions, according to a June 16 *Asia Sentinel* report. In another pushback against Mahathir, Foreign Minister Anifah Aman on June 19 penned an open letter to the *New York Times* accusing Mahathir of undermining his own country.
• **Hijacked oil tanker released; all crew members safe.** Malaysian authorities on June 18 took control of a Malaysian oil tanker hijacked on June 10 while en route from Haiphong, Vietnam, to Kuantan, Malaysia. Most of the crew members were unhurt, except for a cook who was shot in the leg. Malaysia’s navy chief, Abdul Aziz, said the hijackers, believed to be Indonesians, abandoned the tanker on the evening of June 18 after having been pursued by a Malaysian naval ship. The value of the tanker’s gasoline was estimated to be nearly $6 million. Another Malaysian oil tanker was hijacked in the same area earlier this month.

• **Investigation committee probes 1MDB over terminating auditors.** The Public Accounts Committee, a parliamentary committee tasked with investigating troubled state investment fund 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB), on June 17 said that it wants to know why 1MDB terminated two external auditors, KPMG and Ernst & Young, in 2013 and 2010, respectively. KPMG was reportedly rushed to complete the job, while Ernst & Young never finished the audit. 1MDB, which has debt of around $14 billion, is currently seeking equity investors for its $720 million Bandar Malaysia real estate project in the financial district of Kuala Lumpur.

PHILIPPINES

• **MILF starts laying down arms as Congress delays Bangsamoro law.** The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) turned over 75 weapons, including heavy armaments, on June 16 in a ceremony attended by President Benigno Aquino. Nearly 150 MILF fighters also agreed to return to civilian life. Meanwhile, Senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has blocked consideration of the government’s draft Bangsamoro Basic Law, which would implement the peace deal signed with the MILF in early 2014. Marcos plans to submit his own version of the law for consideration in July.

• **Binay resigns from Aquino cabinet.** Vice President Jejomar Binay on June 22 resigned his cabinet posts as chairman of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council and adviser on overseas Filipino workers. Binay’s daughter, Representative Abigail Binay, said the vice president was tired of being a “punching bag” for President Benigno Aquino’s allies. The resignation comes as **two nationwide polls** conducted in early June showed Binay, whose popularity has suffered amid ongoing corruption investigations, trailing Senator Grace Poe for the first time as the preferred choice for president in 2016.

• **Philippines conducts military exercises with U.S., Japan.** Philippine and U.S. forces on June 22 launched the annual bilateral Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercises, which are taking place both in

Senator Grace Poe speaks at a Senate budget hearing. Nationwide polls show Poe leading Vice President Jejomar Binay for the first time as the preferred choice for president in 2016. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grace_Poe-Llamanzares_at_a_Senate_budget_hearing.jpg
and around Palawan—in Puerto Princesa and the Sulu Sea—through June 26. Meanwhile, Philippine and Japanese troops on June 21 launched joint exercises in the South China Sea. Those exercises, which will end on June 27, are just the second ever between the Philippines and Japan. Both sets of training exercises are meant to boost interoperability and Philippine maritime capabilities.

- Economic charter change fails in legislature. Speaker of the House of Representatives Feliciano Belmonte Jr. on July 10 announced that he had failed to round up the 119 votes necessary to pass an amendment to the economic provisions of the Philippine constitution. Belmonte hoped to relax the constitution’s 40 percent limit on foreign ownership by adding the clause “unless otherwise provided by law.” Belmonte had prioritized the charter change despite a lukewarm response from President Benigno Aquino. It is unclear if he will try again when the next legislative session begins July 27.

- Philippines, Taiwan hope to sign fisheries deal by end of year. An official with the Office of the President has said the Philippine Cabinet is considering a proposed fisheries deal with Taiwan and hopes to sign it by the end of the year, according to a June 16 Reuters report. The announcement followed a two-hour standoff on June 6 between the Taiwanese and Philippine coast guards over a Philippine attempt to arrest a Taiwanese fishing vessel. The proposed deal would not delimit the two nations’ overlapping claims in the Luzon Strait.

- One soldier killed, eight injured in southern Philippines explosion. A Philippine army spokesperson on June 16 announced that a soldier was killed and eight others injured when an improvised explosive device detonated on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines. The army suspects that the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf, members of which have sworn allegiance to the Islamic State, is responsible for the attack. The military in March stepped up a months-long offensive against Abu Sayyaf.

INDONESIA

- Jokowi nominates new military commander, intelligence chief. President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo on June 10 nominated General Gatot Nurmatyo, who is currently the army’s chief of staff, to be the next commander-in-chief, replacing General Moeldoko when he retires in August. Jokowi also nominated retired army general and former Jakarta governor Sutiyoso to head Indonesia’s National Intelligence Agency. Gatot’s nomination surprised those who expected the air force chief of staff to become the next military chief, in accordance with the tradition of rotating the position among the chiefs of each military branch.
• Lawmakers want to curb KPK’s authority, monitor intelligence agency more closely. Lawmakers on June 17 announced plans to modify the 2002 Corruption Eradication Law in an effort to curtail the authority of Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) to conduct wiretaps as part of its preliminary investigations. Lawmakers also considered forcing the KPK to hand over its investigation files to the Office of the Attorney General before bringing a case to trial. Lawmakers in charge of monitoring Indonesia's state intelligence agency also announced plans to establish an oversight council to prevent the agency's abuse of power.

• Indonesia accuses Australia of paying traffickers to turn back migrant boats. Indonesia on June 13 condemned Australia for intercepting people smugglers at sea and paying them thousands of dollars to turn back migrant boats toward their country of departure. Indonesian authorities have been in talks with Canberra after the captain of a trafficking vessel said in a police interview that he reportedly received $31,000 from Australian authorities in exchange for turning back a migrant boat to Indonesia. Several asylum seekers have corroborated the captain’s story.

• Jokowi threatens to fire officials who fail to fulfill his agenda. President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo on June 17 said that he is willing to fire cabinet members, as well as other government officials, if they fail to perform their duties. The president made the remarks to reporters and officials after visiting Jakarta’s Tanjung Priok Port, where customs officials are known for taking exceptionally long to clear cargo. Jokowi said that port inefficiencies have made Indonesia uncompetitive compared to neighboring Singapore and Malaysia.

• Pertamina to get majority control of Mahakam oil and gas field. Minister of Energy Sudirman Said on June 19 said that the Indonesian government will grant state-owned oil and gas company Pertamina a 70 percent share of the Mahakam oil and gas field, located off the eastern coast of Borneo, at the end of 2017. France’s Total and Japan’s Inpex Corp., which currently operate the field, will hold the remaining 30 percent share. The Mahakam field accounts for 25 percent of Indonesia’s gas output and almost 10 percent of its oil flows. Total and Inpex each currently holds a 50 percent stake of the field.

THAILAND

• National Assembly unanimously approves interim charter. The National Legislative Assembly met for six hours on June 17 and unanimously passed the draft charter proposed by the Constitutional Drafting Committee, including amendments made by the cabinet. The passage of the charter
opens the door to a national referendum that is expected to let voters not only approve or reject the draft constitution, but also choose to allow the military-led government to remain in power while national reforms are completed.

- **Constitutional Drafting Committee unfazed by threats to reject draft constitution.** Constitution Drafting Committee spokesperson General Lertrat Ratanavanich on June 16 said the threat by some members of the National Reform Council (NRC) to withhold approval of the draft charter would not affect the process of drafting and altering the next constitution. Many members of the NRC have expressed disapproval of certain clauses in the proposed new charter, such as the inclusion of appointed lawmakers and senators.

- **Pick for next army chief narrows.** The military on June 12 announced the names of its upcoming retirees, narrowing the list of those who could succeed army chief Udomdej Sitabutr, who will retire by the end of September. Two assistant army chiefs, Generals Thirachai Nakwanich and Preecha Chan-ocha, a younger brother to Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, have emerged as potential candidates. Analysts expect that a mid-year military leadership shuffle in July will offer more clues about Udomdej’s successor.

- **Central bank holds rates steady in hopes economy is strengthening.** The central bank’s Monetary Policy Committee on June 10 unanimously voted to hold its benchmark interest rate at 1.5 percent after easing it by 0.25 percent the previous quarter. The June issue of the central bank’s Monetary Policy Report concluded that the Thai economy is projected to recover more slowly than previously predicted due to weaker-than-expected export growth. Inflation is projected to ease due to the pressure of lower producer prices and demand.

**VIETNAM**

- **Former political prisoner discusses treatment in prison.** Blogger Nguyen Van Hai, also known as Dieu Cay, recounted his experiences as a political prisoner in Vietnam during testimony before the U.S. Congress on June 17. Hai, who was released in late 2014 at the request of the U.S. government, said that Vietnamese prisoners of conscience are deprived of the rights granted to them under Vietnam’s criminal code. Meanwhile, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Tom Malinowski noted in a June 8 Politico op-ed that Vietnam has released 50 political prisoners in the last two years and has jailed only 1 activist for peaceful expression in 2015, down from 61 in 2013.
• **U.S. investment in Vietnam increases.** Vietnam’s Foreign Investment Agency reported that U.S. firms operating in Vietnam have invested a total of $11 billion in 742 projects as of the end of May 2015, according to a June 14 VietNamNet report, an increase from $7 billion at the end of 2013. U.S. companies have shown greater interest in the Vietnamese market ahead of the conclusion of negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, with Intel recently announcing plans to expand its largest test and assembly plant in Ho Chi Minh City.

• **Vietnam to step up participation in UN peacekeeping.** Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung on June 10 met with UN under secretary-general Hervé Ladsous in Hanoi to discuss Vietnam’s role in international peacekeeping operations. Vietnam began sending its first officers on UN peacekeeping missions in 2014. Dung said that Vietnam is ready to expand the scope of its peacekeeping operations, with plans to increase the number of officers sent for training and to help staff UN field hospitals.

• **Vietnam modifies pension law to appease factory workers.** Vietnamese legislators on June 22 voted by an overwhelming margin to amend the country’s social insurance law to allow employees to receive a lump-sum benefits payment if they are forced to stop working instead of being required to wait until retirement age to receive benefits. The policy change came in response to a series of factory worker protests in and around Ho Chi Minh City in March.

• **Palau burns Vietnamese boats fishing illegally.** Palauan authorities on June 12 burned four Vietnamese fishing vessels caught fishing illegally in Palauan waters and confiscated eight tons of reef fish. The ships’ captains were incarcerated, while 77 crew members were sent home. Palauan authorities have seized a total of 15 illegal fishing boats since 2014.

• **Vietnam waives visa requirements for five European countries in bid to boost tourism.** The Vietnamese government on June 19 announced that tourists from Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom will no longer need a visa to enter Vietnam for stays of up to 15 days, effective July 1. Nearly 8 million tourists visited Vietnam in 2014; however only 3.3 million tourists visited in the first five months of 2015, a 13 percent decrease from the same period in 2014. Vietnam earns about $10 billion a year from tourism and has recently stepped up efforts to promote its tourism sector.

**TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP**

• **House passes TPA in standalone legislation.** The House of Representatives on June 16 voted 218 to 208 to grant President Barack
Former secretary of state Hillary Clinton addressing the ASEAN Business Investment Summit in Bali, Indonesia, in 2011. Clinton, who is running for president, has distanced herself from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, despite having shown support for it during her time as secretary of state. https://www.flickr.com/photos/statephotos/6358400785/in/album-72157628025384437/

Obama Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), or fast-track, in a standalone piece of legislation that was not tied to the passage of a pending Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) bill. In an earlier vote the House had failed to pass TAA as part of a package including TPA. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell on June 18 said he hopes the Senate will pass the TPA bill before July 4; the bill returned to the Senate floor on June 23.

Hillary Clinton urges Obama to listen to Democrats to improve TPP. Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton on June 14 urged President Barack Obama to work with Democratic lawmakers, especially House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, to make changes to the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement so that it reflects Democrats’ concerns and protects U.S. jobs and wages. Clinton, who showed support for TPP during her time as secretary of state in the first Obama administration, made her remarks during a campaign stop in Iowa.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

China announces reclamation at some features to finish soon. China’s Foreign Ministry on June 16 announced that its reclamation work at some features in the Spratly Islands would be completed in the “upcoming days.” The ministry did not clarify which of its seven occupied features work would be completed, but analysis from CSIS suggests that work will continue at Subi and Mischief reefs. The ministry said that construction of facilities will continue at the features even after the reclamation work is completed.

China ignores court’s submission deadline; hearing to be held in July. China failed to make a submission by a June 16 deadline to the tribunal hearing Manila’s case against Beijing’s claims in the South China Sea at the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The court had invited China to submit a rebuttal to a 3,000-page supplemental submission the Philippines made in March. The tribunal will hold a hearing on July 7-13 to make a preliminary determination on whether it has jurisdiction in the case.

Vietnamese official accuses China of attacking, robbing fishermen near Paracels. A local Vietnamese official in central Quang Ngai Province accused Chinese authorities of attacking Vietnamese fisherman near the Paracel Islands three times in early June, according to a June 17 Associated Press report. The official said Chinese military vessels in one instance drove off Vietnamese fishermen with a water cannon, injuring two. On two other occasions, the official said, Chinese authorities boarded Vietnamese vessels and seized their catch and equipment.
CAMBODIA

- Hun Sen elected ruling party president. The ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) on June 20 elected Prime Minister Hun Sen party president following the June 8 death of longtime chief Chea Sim. Party members also elected Interior Minister Sar Kheng and Senate president Say Chhum as co-vice presidents of the party to replace Hun Sen. Many observers saw the unexpected placement of the two on a shared ticket as a move to appease Hun Sen’s rivals within the party.

- UN slams NGO law as it goes to National Assembly. Maina Kiai, the UN special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and association, has said Cambodia’s draft legislation on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is a “clear violation of international law,” according to a June 17 Phnom Penh Post report. The National Assembly is currently reviewing the bill, which has not been officially released to the public. Leaked sections of the law would require all NGOs to register with the government and remain politically neutral.

- First quarter investments up six-fold from 2014. Businesses invested $2.87 billion in Cambodia during the first quarter of 2015, up nearly 600 percent from the same period a year earlier, according to data released on June 13 by the Council for Development of Cambodia. The council did not release detailed statistics, but analysts suggested that a majority of the new investment came from foreign investors in the soft drink, manufacturing, and construction sectors. They attributed the strong investment growth to relative political stability and the economy’s reliance on the dollar.

- Hun Sen pushes Vietnam to stop encroaching on border after fresh spat. Prime Minister Hun Sen has demanded that Vietnam stop encroaching on land allegedly belonging to Cambodia during talks with unspecified members of the Vietnamese Politburo, according to a June 12 Cambodian Foreign Ministry statement. The demand followed a June 8 clash between about 200 Cambodian demonstrators and 50 Vietnamese soldiers near the two countries’ border. The opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party, which led the June 8 demonstration, praised Hun Sen’s remarks, which marked a change in the government’s position on the border dispute.

SINGAPORE

- Shanmugam speaks at CSIS on bilateral ties, ASEAN, and TPP. Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law K Shanmugam spoke at CSIS on June 15 during a visit to Washington. He discussed Singapore’s bilateral
relations with the United States, ASEAN economic integration, and the opportunities and challenges facing Singapore. Shanmugam also issued a strong call for the United States to pass Trade Promotion Authority and conclude the Trans-Pacific Partnership, saying it is vital for U.S. influence in the Asia Pacific.

- **Twitter to double Singapore staff.** Twitter’s vice president for the Asia Pacific on June 10 told the *Wall Street Journal* the company plans to double its Singapore staff over the next two years as it seeks to expand operations in Asia. Twitter will hire more than 100 new staff in Singapore. The company opened a small office there in 2013 and in recent weeks has moved to a larger space, which has now become the company’s Asia-Pacific headquarters. Twitter is still blocked in China but has operations in the rest of Asia, including Hong Kong.

**LAOS**

- **U.S., Laos conclude bilateral dialogue.** Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel and Vice Foreign Minister Sounthone Xayachack on June 19 concluded the sixth U.S.-Laos Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue in Washington. Russel and Sounthone announced that U.S. funding for locating and clearing unexploded ordnance in Laos will be increased to $15 million in 2015, from $13 million in 2014. The two sides also discussed ways to improve bilateral trade and investment relations as well as Laos’s upcoming chairmanship of ASEAN in 2016.
Looking Ahead

- **Launch of Report on Keeping the U.S. Military’s Technological Edge.** The CSIS Defense-Industrial Initiatives Group (DIIG) will host a launch event on June 26 for its new report on how the Department of Defense can better leverage outside innovation to keep its technological advantage. DIIG director Andrew Hunter, Northrop Grumman’s Brett Lambert, the Senate Armed Services Committee’s Arun Seraphin, the Air Force’s Camron Gorguinpour, and BMNT Partners’ Peter Newell will speak at the event. The launch will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. in the CSIS Second Floor Conference Center, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. To RSVP, click here.

- **Annual CNAS Conference.** The Center for a New American Security will host its annual conference on June 26 with the theme “World in Turmoil: Charting America’s Course.” Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken will give a keynote address, and the conference will include 10 expert panels on topics including “Debating China’s Future” and “2017 and Beyond: An Agenda for the Next Administration.” The event will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the JW Marriott, 1331 Pennsylvania Ave., NW. For more information, click here.

- **India-Bangladesh in the wake of Modi’s visit to Bangladesh.** The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on June 29 will host a discussion on India-Bangladesh relations with Farooq Sobhan, president and CEO of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, ahead of Indian prime minister Narendra Modi’s expected visit to Bangladesh. The event will take place from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Carnegie Endowment, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW. To RSVP, click here.

- **Discussion on the U.S.-China Strategic & Economic Dialogue.** The CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies will host a discussion on July 9 analyzing the seventh U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED), which is currently ongoing, and examining the dialogue’s future. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury Robert Dohner, Treasury senior coordinator for the S&ED Christopher Adams, and Deputy Secretary of State Susan Thornton will share their insights. The event will take place from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the CSIS First Floor Conference Room, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. To RSVP, e-mail freemanchair@csis.org.

- **The Fifth Annual South China Sea Conference at CSIS.** The Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies will host CSIS’s fifth annual full-day South China Sea conference on July 21. The conference will provide opportunities
for in-depth discussion and analysis of U.S. and Asian policy options and
feature speakers from throughout the region. The event will take place
from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the CSIS Second Floor Conference Center,
1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. For more information and to RSVP, click here.
SOUTHEAST ASIA FROM SCOTT CIRCLE
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