

Southeast Asia from Scott Circle

Volume V | Issue 10 | May 15, 2014

Thailand in Crisis: Options for U.S. Policy

MURRAY HIEBERT

Murray Hiebert is senior fellow and deputy director of the Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

May 15, 2014

The CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies hosted a “[Thailand in Crisis: Scenarios and Policy Responses](#)” conference on May 13. Speakers explored why Thailand matters to the United States, Thai politics in historical perspective, and how the crisis will shape the future Thai political order, and delved into policy options for the United States.

The conference was held in the midst of months-long disruptive protests in Bangkok led by the antigovernment People’s Democratic Reform Council aimed at toppling the Pheu Thai government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, which is backed by her brother, exiled former prime minister Thaksin. Yingluck was [ousted by the Constitutional Court](#) a week before the conference for illegally transferring a top civil servant three years earlier.

Senior U.S. officials speaking at the conference stressed the importance of the United States’ relations with Thailand, which was the first Asian nation to establish diplomatic relations with the United States and remains one of its largest trade and investment partners. Bangkok is home to one of the largest U.S. embassies in the world and the base from which the United States launches many of its aid and training programs in Southeast Asia. The United States and Thailand work closely together on regional security, including peacekeeping initiatives, counternarcotics enforcement, and

Inside This Issue

BIWEEKLY UPDATE

- Court order removes Yingluck from office
- Chinese oil rig near Paracels leads to standoff with Vietnam
- Coalitions lining up behind Jokowi, Prabowo

LOOKING AHEAD

- Discussion with the U.S. chief of naval operations
- Launch of *Asia in the World*
- Luncheon discussion on the TPP and T-TIP

Thailand in Crisis: Options for U.S. Policy *(continued)*



Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Scot Marciel addresses the audience at CSIS's "Thailand in Crisis" conference. Marciel and the Department of Defense's Amy Searight spoke on the day's first panel, "Why Thailand Matters to the United States." https://www.flickr.com/photos/csis_er/14207217833/

antipiracy programs. Much of the limited military-to-military cooperation between the United States and Myanmar is done in cooperation with Thailand.

Several panelists warned about the possibility of serious violence erupting in Bangkok with militant factions on both sides of the dispute obtaining weapons from their military supporters and across the border from Cambodia. Some felt the vitriolic dispute will become worse before any compromise can be reached. The current standoff began in 2005 and some warned that it will likely continue for another 10 years with both sides determined to be holding the prime minister's seat when the royal succession takes place after the current, highly revered king, who has been on the throne for 67 years, dies.

Over the past century, Thai politics has often been bumpy, but the political culture has had "shock absorbers" to cushion the bumps and get the country back to a political middle, one panelist observed. This time, however, the normal "reset buttons"—a coup followed by the drafting of a new constitution and a new round of elections that bring to power officials who soon alienate large swaths of the electorate, prompting another cycle of change—is not working. This is due in part to the fact that Thaksin keeps winning elections and the opposition Democrat Party has not mounted reforms that would help it compete with the populism of its opponent.

Amy Searight, the top Defense Department official responsible for Southeast Asia, said the United States is "reasonably confident" the Thai military will not stage another coup despite the ongoing turmoil. Other panelists pointed out that the military has actually tried to play a mediating role between the two sides to mitigate the conflict, but the opposition has rejected its overtures. So the military has looked to the courts, the election commission, and the national anticorruption agency to help engineer its return to power.

Conference participants expressed concern that the political crisis is causing Thailand's alliance with the United States to underperform and is holding back ASEAN on a number of fronts, particularly because Thai ministers or acting ministers have not been able to travel or participate fully in meetings in recent months. Although Thailand hosted the Cobra Gold military exercises in February, many other joint meetings or events with the United States or neighbors are largely on hold.

Thailand in Crisis: Options for U.S. Policy *(continued)*



Participants agreed that, in the end, the crisis can only be solved by the Thais themselves. It is not one that foreigners can fix. Still, many thought there were a few things that supportive foreigners could do on the margins of the intractable and highly emotional divide.

One recommendation is for the United States to keep stressing, mostly in private meetings with Thai leaders across the political spectrum, the unacceptability of the Thai military staging a coup, the critical importance of maintaining the principles of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights, and the necessity of avoiding violence and bloodshed. Some recommended sending a group of either prominent Americans or an international delegation including senior political figures such as former senator Richard Lugar, who long served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to have quiet conversations with leaders on both sides of the conflict about ways to resolve the standoff peacefully and through democratic means.

Others suggested that Americans and other international players could play an important service as bridge builders by bringing small groups of Thai protagonists together for meals and quiet conversations. The goal would be to bring together people who cannot be seen meeting publicly in the current confrontational atmosphere in an effort to try to recapture a middle ground. Because U.S. Embassy statements supporting democracy have been condemned by the opposition as siding with the government against the protestors, some suggested that U.S. initiatives and statements must originate from Washington if they are to have any effect.

The University of Leeds' Duncan McCargo speaks during the second panel, "Putting Modern Thai Politics in a Historical Context," of the CSIS conference on Thailand. McCargo is flanked, from left to right, by CSIS's Murray Hiebert, AsiaTimes' Shawn Crispin, Colonel Jonathan Cole (ret.), and Human Rights Watch's Sunai Phasuk. https://www.flickr.com/photos/csis_er/14000413229/

Thailand in Crisis: Options for U.S. Policy *(continued)*

Participants also discussed forming an eminent persons group of private Thais and Americans who could meet and make suggestions to the U.S. government and the Thai protagonists about steps to address the crisis. Thailand's seven major business associations have tried to mediate between the two factions, but they were spurned much like the military was. This prompted some to urge that U.S. business groupings (such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the US-ASEAN Business Council) should use their connections with Thai political leaders to talk quietly about the importance of resolving the impasse before it undermines Thai competitiveness in the region and prompts companies to look to neighbors for alternative locations for their investment projects.

For the United States to continue to play a key role in Thailand, it will be important for the Senate to quickly confirm a new U.S. ambassador once he or she is nominated to ensure there is no gap in Bangkok at this sensitive time. ■



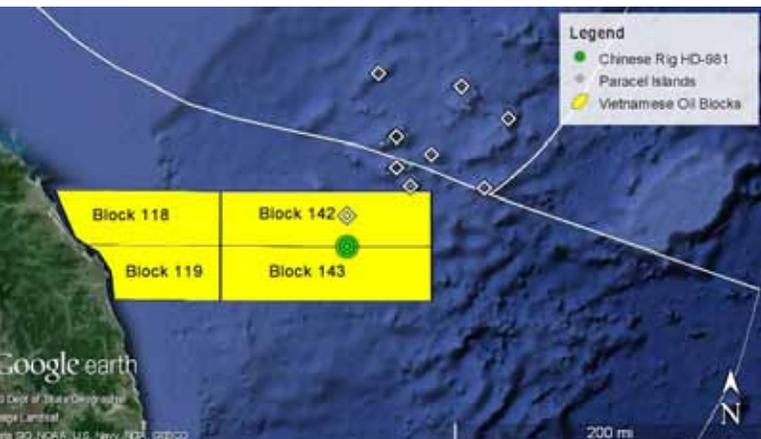
Thailand's new interim prime minister, Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan. After the Constitutional Court ousted his predecessor Yingluck Shinawatra, Niwatthamrong has taken responsibility for seeing Thailand through to planned elections in July. https://www.flickr.com/photos/world_trade_organization/11215827664/

THAILAND

- **Court order removes Yingluck from office.** Thailand's Constitutional Court on May 7 found caretaker prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra **guilty of abuse of power** for the 2011 transfer of then-National Security Council secretary-general Thawil Pliensri and ordered her to step down. The government appointed caretaker deputy prime minister and commerce minister **Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan** to take Yingluck's place over the objections of antigovernment demonstrators, who are demanding that the Senate appoint a new prime minister.
- **Anti-corruption commission seeks Yingluck's impeachment.** The National Anti-Corruption Commission on May 8 decided to pursue impeachment proceedings against ousted prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra for her mishandling of the government's controversial rice subsidy program. The case has been forwarded to the Senate, which on May 9 elected Surachai Liangboonlertchai, favored by the government's opponents, as its new speaker. The Senate will vote on impeachment, but analysts believe it is unlikely to garner the 90 votes necessary. If impeached, Yingluck will be barred from public office for five years.
- **Strong earthquake rocks northern Thailand.** A 6.3 magnitude earthquake hit the Chiang Rai region of northern Thailand on May 5, killing one and injuring dozens. Authorities closed Wat Rongkhun, a well-known temple near the city, due to safety concerns after tiles and a spire fell from the roof of its main building. Authorities continue to monitor five active fault lines in the region. Thailand has not felt such a strong earthquake since a 5.1 magnitude quake hit Chiang Mai in 2006.
- **Nine injured in bomb attacks in southern Thailand.** Two bombs exploded minutes apart on May 6, injuring nine bystanders in the tourist city of Hat Yai in southern Thailand. Closed-circuit video showed four unidentified individuals leaving a motorcycle near a convenience store and parking an explosive-laden car in a police station parking lot before fleeing the scene. Songkhla Province police claim that separatist groups are responsible for the attacks and believe the same groups committed a similar bomb attack in late 2013.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

- **Chinese oil rig near Paracels leads to standoff with Vietnam.** The China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) on May 2 moved a drilling rig



China's drilling rig HD-981 was placed in disputed waters at 5°29'58" north latitude and 111°12'06" east longitude. The resulting standoff between China and Vietnam has resulted in the use of high-powered water cannons and the ramming of Coast Guard vessels. http://coqitasia.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ChinaOilRig1_800.jpg

into **disputed waters** south of the Paracel Islands, on what Vietnam claims as its continental shelf. China has sent more than 80 vessels, including 7 navy ships, to support the rig. Vietnam has objected and sent more than 20 Coast Guard and fisheries surveillance ships to prevent the rig's operations. The two nations have each accused the other of using water cannons and ramming other vessels in the standoff, which has driven bilateral relations to their lowest level in years.

- **Philippines arrests Chinese fishermen in Spratlys.**

Philippine authorities on May 7 arrested 11 Chinese fishermen caught with more than 800 endangered sea turtles near Half Moon Shoal, part of the disputed Spratly Islands. Prosecutors on May 12 charged 9 of the 11 fishermen with violating two Philippine laws on poaching and wildlife protection. The other two, who were found to be minors, will be turned over to the Department of Social Welfare and Development to be released. China also claims the shoal, which lies 70 miles from the Philippine island of Palawan. Manila has refused Beijing's demands that the fishermen be released.

- **China building structures on disputed reef.** Philippine officials lodged a protest against China on May 13 after surveillance photographs showed a resurgence in Chinese construction and reclamation projects on Johnson South Reef, which China, the Philippines, and Vietnam all claim. Chinese took the reef from Vietnam in 1988 in a battle that killed as many as 90 Vietnamese troops. A spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry confirmed the construction but would not provide details. Manila asserts that new construction on disputed features is a violation of the 2002 ASEAN-China Declaration of Conduct for Parties in the South China Sea.

INDONESIA

- **Authorities announce official parliamentary election results.** The Indonesian Election Commission on May 9 announced the official results of the 2014 parliamentary elections. The results closely matched April 9 quick-count estimates, with Jakarta governor and presidential frontrunner Joko Widodo's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, or PDI-P, garnering almost 19 percent of votes. The Golkar party followed with nearly 15 percent, and the Great Indonesia Movement Party, or Gerindra, with about 12 percent. Seven other parties secured seats in the parliament.
- **Coalitions lining up behind Jokowi, Prabowo.** Broad coalitions are lining up behind presidential candidates Joko "Jokowi" Widodo of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle and Prabowo Subianto of

the Great Indonesia Movement Party ahead of a May 20 deadline to submit presidential nominations. Golkar, which came in second in April's legislative elections, along with the National Democrats and the Islamic National Awakening Party, have lent their support to Jokowi. The other three Islamic parties have said they will join Prabowo. Jokowi's coalition accounts for about half and Prabowo's about a third of the votes cast in April's legislative elections. The ruling Democrat Party and the People's Conscience Party remain undeclared.

- **Yudhoyono revises negative investment list.** President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on May 2 released Indonesia's revised negative investment list to direct foreign investment into specific sectors of the economy while protecting others. The revision increases the limit on ownership by foreign firms in the transportation, film, pharmaceutical, large-scale electricity, and finance sectors. The revision further limits foreign ownership in the energy, mining, and communication sectors, and bans it in the retail trade sector.
- **Indonesian navy finds 19 asylum seekers shortly after Abbott cancels Bali visit.** The Indonesian navy on May 4 found 19 asylum seekers stranded on Lay Island in East Nusa Tenggara Province. The asylum seekers had been towed back to Indonesian waters by the Australian navy. The discovery came a day after Australian prime minister Tony Abbott canceled a trip to Bali aimed at thawing tensions between the two countries. Abbott's cancellation appeared to be related to the Australian navy's action.
- **Navy requests 16 antisubmarine helicopters.** The Indonesian navy on May 1 requested that the Defense Ministry acquire 16 Eurocopter AS565 Panther antisubmarine helicopters, according to First Admiral Untung Suropati. The French-made helicopters are equipped to detect submarines and torpedoes, and will be deployed on warships to augment their fighting capacity. They will be the first antisubmarine helicopters in the Indonesian navy.



A Eurocopter AS565 Panther landing on the USS Decatur. The Indonesian navy has requested 16 Panthers to increase its antisubmarine capacity. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Panther-051306-N-9546C-001.jpg>

MYANMAR

- **Kachin, government agree to form monitoring group.** Members of the Kachin Independence Organization and government negotiators led by Union Minister Aung Min agreed during talks that began May 13 to form a joint monitoring committee to observe ongoing fighting in northern Myanmar's Kachin State and try to ratchet down violence. The fighting, which escalated on May 5, has displaced thousands in Kachin and neighboring Shan State, and threatens to derail efforts to reach



A June 2013 protest against the Myanmar government's offensive in Kachin State. Myanmar government negotiators have agreed to set up a monitoring mechanism with the Kachin Independence Organization to observe the ongoing fighting. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/burmapartnership/8993844109>

a nationwide cease-fire. Members of the Karen National Union raised concerns over the fighting during May 5 talks with Aung Min, saying it could obstruct peace negotiations.

- **Arakan conference calls for creation of army to protect Buddhist residents from Muslims.** Representatives of political parties and armed groups in western Myanmar's Rakhine State, also called Arakan, wrapped up a five-day Arakan National Conference on May 1 with a call to create a local armed force to protect the 2.3 million Rakhine Buddhists from the state's Muslim population, believed to number up to 1 million. Rakhine militant groups, which led fighting against the central government prior to the transition to civilian rule, have offered their services to protect Buddhists in the villages of Buthidaung and Maungdaw, which have majority Muslim Rohingya populations.
- **88 Generation, NLD to hold joint constitutional reform rallies.** National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Min Ko Naing, who heads the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society group, will jointly address rallies in Yangon and Mandalay on May 17 and 18 to push for constitutional reform and kick-start a national campaign. The two groups are seeking to mobilize popular support and petition the government to change article 436, which gives the military an effective veto over constitutional change. This marks a shift for the NLD, which previously focused most of its attention on a constitutional provision that bars Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency.
- **Lawmakers question news of land returns due to lack of follow-through.** Parliamentarians on May 4 expressed concerns that the process of returning land seized by the former military government lacks transparency. Opposition lawmaker Min Thu said that there is no clear evidence of follow-through on returning the land despite claims by local officials. Other parliamentarians have pointed out that the Land Use Management Committee in charge of land returns has refused to honor official requests for information. Members of the parliament's Farmland Investigation Committee in late April recommended the government switch to an open arbitration process to handle land disputes.
- **Hundreds protest the imprisonment of journalist Zaw Pe.** About 200 activists and journalists marched through Magwe in central Myanmar on May 6 to protest the arrest of Zaw Pe, Democratic Voice of Burma's local correspondent, and to demand greater press freedom. The opposition National League for Democracy and the 88 Generation civil society group have voiced support for the movement. Democratic Voice of Burma

reporter Angus Watson, an Australian, was deported after covering the protest. Critics charge that these are the latest in a string of arrests and abuses that signal a tightening of Myanmar's media environment.

ASEAN

- **Leaders discuss South China Sea, Thailand, ASEAN community at summit in Naypyidaw.** Heads of state from every ASEAN member except Thailand attended the biannual ASEAN Summit in Naypyidaw from May 10 to 11. Discussions focused heavily on tensions in the South China Sea and the political crisis in Thailand. The ASEAN foreign ministers released joint statements ahead of the leaders' meeting calling for peaceful resolutions to each crisis. The ASEAN leaders also reaffirmed plans to complete an ASEAN Economic Community, meaning in theory a single market, by the end of 2015.
- **Member states to reform Chiang Mai Initiative bond system, implementation guidelines.** The finance ministers and bank chiefs of Japan, China, South Korea, and the 10 ASEAN member states announced plans on May 3 to reform the bond system and guidelines for implementation of the Chiang Mai Initiative. The 13 members will seek to better integrate fund and securities settlement systems to encourage fund flows from banks to the bond market, raise the credit limit on bonds, and revise the Chiang Mai Initiative guidelines to facilitate this process.

PHILIPPINES

- **U.S., Philippines hold annual war games.** The United States and the Philippines held their annual 10-day naval exercises, known as Balikatan, from May 5 to 15. Australian special forces also took part in the exercises, which came just a week after presidents Barack Obama and Benigno Aquino signed an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement to strengthen military ties between the two countries. The exercises aimed to promote maritime security, including antipiracy and humanitarian assistance efforts. Philippines foreign secretary Albert Del Rosario highlighted increasing tensions over claims in the South China Sea as a primary cause of concern.
- **Philippines considers constitutional ban on political dynasties.** Fredenil Castro, a lawmaker from the ruling Liberal Party, introduced a bill in the Philippine House of Representatives on May 6 that would ban spouses and close relatives from running for office in the same elections. The bill is meant to target political families, including that of President Benigno



U.S. Navy SH-60 Seahawks during joint training as part of the annual U.S.-Philippines Balikatan exercises. The exercises kicked off just a week after President Barack Obama's visit to the Philippines. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/compacflt/14142504522/>

Aquino, whom Castro claims are responsible for many problems now facing the country. Despite previous attempts to craft an antipolitical dynasty bill, this is the first time one has made it to the House floor.

- **Dozens arrested in cyber extortion bust.** Philippine police, with the help of Interpol, arrested 58 members of an online crime syndicate in Manila and several other Philippines cities on May 2. The suspects are accused of tricking individuals into exposing themselves online and then blackmailing them for profit. A Scottish teenager's suicide last year is allegedly linked to the group's attempts at extortion. The suspects were identified after authorities traced online conversations from victims' computers.
- **Suspect in Maguindanao massacre arrested.** Warden Kusain Legawan, a suspect in the 2009 Maguindanao massacre, was apprehended on May 7, according to Philippine police. Legawan was charged with 36 counts of murder. In November 2009, 58 people, including Baluan vice mayor Esmael Mangudadatu, his wife and sisters, and dozens of journalists, were killed while traveling in Maguindanao Province in the southern Philippines. Mangudadatu was planning to submit his candidacy for governor of Maguindanao. Then-governor Andal Ampatuan and members of his family have been charged with orchestrating the massacre.

MALAYSIA

- **Opposition politician Teresa Kok charged with sedition.** Malaysian prosecutors on May 6 charged opposition politician Teresa Kok with sedition over a political satire video she posted online for Chinese New Year on January 31. Some Muslim citizens reportedly filed complaints with police arguing that the video insulted Islam, though how remains unclear. Kok starred in the 11-minute video, which poked fun at a wide range of national issues. She has pleaded not guilty and is free on bail.
- **Chinese national kidnapped in Sabah.** A Chinese national was kidnapped from a fishery farm he managed in the eastern state of Sabah on May 6. It was the latest in a series of recent kidnappings in eastern Malaysia, including one of a German couple from waters near the Malaysia-Philippines border in late April and another of a Chinese national and a Philippine employee from a Sabah diving resort on April 2. Authorities suspect that the southern Philippine extremist group Abu Sayyaf is responsible for the kidnappings.
- **Sabah church loses "Allah" challenge.** Malaysia's High Court on May 5 rejected a case by a Protestant church in eastern Malaysia's Sabah State

challenging authorities' 2007 seizure of church books containing the word "Allah." The books were returned in 2008, but the church is still seeking recognition of its right to refer to God as "Allah." The High Court said it is bound by a 2013 Appeals Court ruling that "the use of 'Allah' is not integral to the practice and faith of Christianity." In that case, the court found that a Catholic magazine, the *Herald*, could not use the term. Malaysian churches contend that they have long used the term in Malay-language services and materials.

- **Thousands attend antitax rally.** More than 15,000 protestors gathered in central Kuala Lumpur on May 1 to protest a planned goods and services tax. The demonstration was organized by 95 nongovernmental organizations to coincide with International Labor Day. Prime Minister Najib Razak announced in October 2013 that the new tax would take effect in April 2015, sparking concerns that it will raise the cost of living.



A May 1 anti-goods and services tax rally in central Kuala Lumpur. An estimated 15,000 protestors joined the protest to express their anger over the tax's potential effect on living costs. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/thewallpart5/14100174423/>

VIETNAM

- **Protesters burn down foreign businesses, kill up to 20 Chinese.** Peaceful protests against China's placement of an oil rig in disputed waters in the South China Sea turned violent on May 13 and 14 when thousands of workers in Binh Duong Province near Ho Chi Minh City attacked businesses they believed to be Chinese-owned, many of which turned out to be owned by Taiwanese and Korean companies. The next day, rioters set a Taiwanese steel mill in central Vietnam on fire and attacked its Chinese workers, leaving up to 16 Chinese and 5 Vietnamese dead. Local authorities in Binh Duong said 15 factories were burned in the rioting there, while a Taiwanese official claimed at least 200 were looted or destroyed. Authorities have detained at least 440 protesters.
- **Vietnam arrests two bloggers for anti-state writings.** Authorities in Vietnam on May 5 arrested two bloggers on charges of publishing antistate information. Nguyen Huu Vinh, popularly known as Ba Sam, and Nguyen Thi Minh Thuy, described as Vinh's associate, were arrested at their homes and could face up to seven years in prison if convicted. Their arrests appear to signal a renewed crackdown on online dissent following the early release of three political dissidents in April.
- **Vietnam celebrates Dien Bien Phu victory.** Vietnamese gathered in the northwestern city of Dien Bien Phu on May 7 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Vietnam's victory over French forces. The bloody two-month battle at Dien Bien Phu led to the fall of French colonial rule and

to independence for what are now Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The victory was an important milestone in the history of liberation movements because it was the first time a non-European colonial independence movement defeated a modern Western occupier.

- **Authorities arrest railway officials in bribery scandal.** Police arrested five senior Vietnamese railway officials between May 3 and 8 as part of a probe into allegations that a Japanese firm paid large kickbacks to win a railway contract in Hanoi. Japanese media reported in March that the head of Japan Transportation Consultants, Tamio Kakinuma, admitted that his company paid a \$790,000 bribe to win the contract to build a rail line in Hanoi. Vietnamese authorities have vowed to investigate and punish all guilty parties.

CAMBODIA

- **Police crack down on May Day rallies.** Cambodian police on May 1 cracked down on demonstrators who gathered at Phnom Penh's Freedom Park in defiance of a ban on public protest. At least five participants were injured when police used clubs, tear gas, and water cannons to disperse protesters. The violence began shortly after opposition leaders Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha delivered speeches at the May Day demonstration demanding higher wages and political reform.
- **More than 20,000 garment workers end strike for pay bonus.** Some 20,000 garment workers on May 5 returned to their jobs, ending a strike that began on April 21 to demand a \$50 bonus from factories. The Collective Union of Movement of Workers reported on May 4 that factory owners promised to pay the bonus in return for workers abstaining from walkouts for three months. The Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia denied that factories made any such promises, according to a May 5 Channel NewsAsia article.
- **Body of Canadian filmmaker Dave Walker found.** The body of Canadian journalist Dave Walker, 58, was discovered on May 3 outside of a gate to the Angkor Thom temple complex in northwestern Cambodia, 10 days after his April 24 disappearance. Walker was working on a film about the 1975-1979 reign of the Khmer Rouge at the time of his disappearance. His family and friends are calling on Cambodian officials to investigate his death, emphasizing his previous connections with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.
- **Court again delays trial of garment workers arrested in January.** The Phnom Penh Municipal Court on May 6 delayed for the second time the



A Cambodian garment worker in Phnom Penh. More than 20,000 garment workers returned to work on May 5 after more than two weeks of strikes demanding a \$50 bonus. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/worldbank/8758051143/>

trial of 23 garment workers arrested during a deadly January 3 crackdown on a workers' strike. Presiding judge Keo Mony ruled that the proceedings would resume on May 20 to allow for additional review of evidence, according to a May 6 Radio Free Asia article. Local rights group Licadho believes the trial delays are a bid by the ruling Cambodian People's Party to force concessions from the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party.

SINGAPORE

- **Singapore reaches deal with U.S. to clamp down on tax evasion.**

Singapore on May 6 agreed in substance to abide by the U.S. Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA), which requires non-U.S. financial institutions to regularly report information to the United States' Internal Revenue Service on bank accounts owned by U.S. citizens. The move is part of the city-state's accelerated efforts to comply with international standards by clamping down on tax evasion and money-laundering, according to a May 6 *Financial Times* article.

- **Growth increases in manufacturing sector.** Production in Singapore's manufacturing sector grew in April for the fourth consecutive month, despite a regional slowdown in factory production. The city-state's purchasing managers' index, a monthly gauge of activity in the sector, reached 51.1 in April, up from 50.8 in March, according to a May 5 *Straits Times* article. The Singapore Institute of Purchasing and Materials Management attributes the growth to new export orders as well as increased production output and inventory.

- **Singapore named "best place in Asia to be a mother."** For the second consecutive year, Singapore has been named the best place in Asia to be a mother, according to Save the Children's annual *State of the World's Mothers Report* published on May 7. The report assesses 178 countries on such indicators as maternal and child mortality rates, percentage of women in leadership, and quality of life for mothers. Singapore ranks 15th globally, higher than New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

LAOS

- **Wife of missing activist appeals for help in United States.** Ng Shui Meng, the wife of missing Lao agronomist and civil society leader Sombath Somphone, visited Washington from April 28 to May 1 to urge Congress and the administration to press the Lao government on the case. Sombath



A Singaporean mother and baby. For the second year in a row, Save the Children has named Singapore the best place in Asia to be a mother. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/tamaracraiu/8618007347>

was last seen on December 15, 2012, when video footage showed him being stopped at a police checkpoint and then driven away by two unidentified men. Foreign governments have demanded answers from the Lao government and offered to help with the investigation, but Vientiane has refused. Ng spoke to CSIS during her visit.

- **Japan pledges aid for bridge construction and study program.** Japan on May 6 pledged \$24 million in aid to Laos for bridge construction and a human resources development scholarship. The funding will be used to build a bridge in southern Laos to improve transportation between Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. The scholarship program will allow 20 people from Laos, including public servants, to visit Japan for training.



A woman reading a newspaper in Timor-Leste. The country has passed a new media law that set up a press council answerable to Parliament, which could lead to greater government control over the behavior of journalists. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jpesperanca/2383794779/>

TIMOR-LESTE

- **Timor-Leste establishes press council.** Timor-Leste on May 6 passed a new media law establishing a press council answerable to Parliament and responsible for monitoring the behavior of journalists. The council will consist of three senior journalists and two citizens selected by Parliament, and will have the right to impose fines and jail journalists who are accused of breaking media laws. Authorities passed the law despite vocal protest by journalists.
- **Timor-Leste approves special administrative and economic zone.** Timor-Leste in early May took steps toward creating the Oecussi Special Administrative Zone to allow greater financial and administrative autonomy for the region. Oecussi District is an exclave on the northern coast of the island of Timor, separated from the rest of Timor-Leste and surrounded on three sides by Indonesia. The planned zone will include a Social Market Economy Special Zone, a project headed by former prime minister Mari Alkatiri that will seek to create a strategic development hub.

BRUNEI

- **Sultan implements first phase of shari'a law.** Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah officially implemented the first phase of Brunei's new shari'a law code on April 29. The phase includes many of the code's lesser penalties, including fines and potential jail time for Muslims who miss Friday prayers. The second and third phases will fully institute shari'a law and include death by stoning for Muslim adulterers. Outside groups including Human Rights Watch have condemned the new code, calling it a huge step backward for human rights in the sultanate.

- **Brunei and Malaysia conduct joint oil spill response exercises.** Brunei and Malaysia carried out joint oil spill exercises called Golden Shield 2014 on May 6-8. The exercises aimed to increase the two nations' joint capacity to manage spills. During opening remarks on May 6, Brunei Marine Department director Matnor Salleh emphasized the importance of interagency integration between the two countries to cope effectively with spills. The exercise was organized by Brunei Shell Petroleum and Shell Malaysia Exploration Production Facility. ■

- **Discussion with the U.S. chief of naval operations.** The CSIS Asia Program and International Security Program will cohost a discussion May 19 with Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert. The admiral will discuss the U.S. Navy's rebalance to the Asia Pacific, with an introduction by CSIS president and Pritzker chair John Hamre. The event will take place from 8:45 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. in the CSIS 2nd Floor Conference Room, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. Please [click here](#) to RSVP.
- **Launch of *Asia in the World*.** The Wilson Center's Asia Program will host a launch event on May 27 for *Asia in the World: Economic, Political, Military, and Social Challenges*. The book's editors, David Shambaugh and Michael Yahuda, will join George Washington University's Robert Sutter, American University's Amitav Acharya, and National Defense University's Phillip Saunders to discuss developments in Asia. A reception will follow the launch. The event will take place from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the Wilson Center's sixth floor auditorium, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW. Please [click here](#) to RSVP.
- **Luncheon discussion on the TPP and T-TIP.** The National Economists Club will host a discussion May 29 on the Trans-Pacific Partnership and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership trade agreements. The National Association of Manufacturers' Linda Dempsey will examine the opportunities and challenges that these agreements present for the United States. The luncheon will take place from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Chinatown Garden Restaurant, 618 H St., NW. For more information and to purchase a seat, please [click here](#).
- **Conference on Asia, energy, and national security.** The Center for a New American Security will host its eighth annual National Security Conference on June 11. Discussion topics will include the U.S. leadership role in the Asia Pacific, the changing global energy landscape, and the future of defense technology. Speakers will include National Security Advisor Susan Rice. The event will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Willard InterContinental Hotel, 4101 Pennsylvania Ave., NW. For more information and to RSVP, please [click here](#).
- **Benefit concert for the Philippines.** The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is hosting "After the Storm: A Benefit Concert for the Philippines" on June 15. Performers will include Joshua Bell, Darren Criss, Lea Salonga, Lou Diamond Phillips, apl. de. ap., Christine Rocas, Rodell Rosel, and others. Tickets went on sale April 4 and can be bought online [here](#). The concert will take place at 8:00 p.m.

- **Seminar on cultures of the Mekong River basin.** The Smithsonian Associates will host an all-day seminar August 2 on the cultures of the Mekong basin. George Mason University's Robert DeCaroli will present sessions on the history of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. The event will take place from 10:00 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. at the S. Dillon Ripley Center, 1100 Jefferson Dr., SW. For more information and to buy tickets, please [click here](#). ■

SOUTHEAST ASIA FROM SCOTT CIRCLE

CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies contributors:

Ernest Z. Bower, Senior Adviser and Chair
Murray Hiebert, Senior Fellow and Deputy Director
Gregory Poling, Fellow
Phuong Nguyen, Research Associate
Dylan Kean, Researcher
Brian Kraft, Researcher
Kathryn Tinker, Researcher
Courtney Weatherby, Researcher

For more details on our programs and to follow CSIS with real-time updates, follow the CSIS Chair for Southeast Asia Studies:



On Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/CSISSoutheastAsia>



On Twitter at [@SoutheastAsiaDC](https://twitter.com/SoutheastAsiaDC).



On our blog, [cogitASIA](http://cogitASIA.com) at <http://cogitASIA.com>

Thank you for your interest in U.S. policy in Southeast Asia and the CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies. Join the conversation!

This newsletter is published by the Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., a private, tax-exempt institution focusing on international public policy issues. CSIS's research is nonpartisan and nonproprietary. CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

© 2014 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.