U.S. Interests in Myanmar Require Looking beyond the 2015 Elections

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U.S. policy toward Myanmar is seen by many as one of the most important successes of President Barack Obama’s first term. U.S. engagement played a critical role in lending momentum to political reform in the country. But U.S.-Myanmar relations have appeared somewhat stalled in Obama’s second term.

In addition to human rights, communal tensions, and the prospects for military reform, one major issue that has hobbled further engagement is the need for constitutional reform to allow opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to contest the presidency in 2015. Yet if the United States wants to promote its long-term interests in Myanmar, Washington will need to start planning its policies with an eye beyond 2015 and prepare to deal with a Myanmar that might not have Aung San Suu Kyi at its helm.

A number of U.S. lawmakers have openly questioned whether the administration has decided to embrace Naypyidaw too quickly. Congress in January passed a spending bill that makes removal of the remaining U.S. sanctions conditional on wide-ranging reforms, including making Myanmar’s constitution more democratic and achieving substantial progress on human rights. In April, a bill was introduced that would suspend U.S. security assistance to Myanmar in the next two years unless the government takes steps to establish civilian control of the armed forces and amend the constitution. For many in Congress, amending the
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constitution essentially means changing Article 59(f), known as the “Suu Kyi clause,” which bars individuals from becoming president if their spouses or children hold foreign citizenship. This formulation disqualifies Aung San Suu Kyi, whose sons are British citizens.

These are important issues, but by basing U.S. engagement on them, policymakers risk missing the bigger picture, including other significant reforms under way in Myanmar. What will happen in 2015 is, at this point, anybody’s guess. Washington needs to face the fact that democratic change may continue, but not in the shape that the United States has hoped.

Over the past year, the debate around constitutional reform has been front and center in Myanmar politics. Yet it has shifted from a narrative largely focused on Article 59(f) to concern with the military’s role in politics, manifest in widespread public calls—including from Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD)—to overturn Article 436, which requires the support of more than 75 percent of parliamentarians to approve any constitutional amendment. This in effect gives military representatives, who hold 25 percent of parliamentary seats, veto power over changes to the constitution.

The removal of Article 436 would pave the way for amending many other sensitive areas of the constitution, such as the role of ethnic groups in a federal system and possible reforms to the electoral system, resulting in a more democratic environment. But these measures will not immediately lead to a reduced presence of the military in the legislature or parliamentary support for voting down the Suu Kyi clause.

Meanwhile, the government’s ongoing efforts to negotiate a nationwide cease-fire and build trust with ethnic armies means that a variety of ethnic groups may decide to support a second term for President Thein Sein instead of an Aung San Suu Kyi presidency. Leaders from the Karen National Union did just that during a meeting this week with the president. Thein Sein said recently that regardless of his health, he would stay on for another five years if that is what the people desired.
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In reality, several key figures, including presumed presidential candidates Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing and parliamentary speaker Shwe Mann as well as emerging power players among ethnic political parties, have their eyes on the 2015 elections and have an interest in leaving the Suu Kyi clause intact. This means that the chances of amending the constitution in her favor before the elections are diminishing by the day.

In addition, there will be considerable political jockeying ahead of the elections and the earlier wisdom that the NLD will win overwhelmingly at the expense of the ruling, military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party needs to be adjusted. Whether Aung San Suu Kyi is eligible for the presidency or not, the NLD will face stiff competition, including from several popular ethnic parties, and its ability to win a majority in the 2015 elections is unclear.

There have been marked improvements as a whole on the human rights front since Myanmar’s government launched reforms in 2011. Press freedom, freedom of speech, and other civil liberties have expanded rapidly, most political prisoners have been released, and measures have been taken to raise public awareness on international labor standards and train the police on international practices. To be sure, the continuing humanitarian crisis facing the Rohingya in Rakhine state, sporadic harassment of journalists, and the violent tactics used by the military against civilians in Kachin state and other conflict areas continue to stain Naypyidaw’s human rights record.

But the United States needs to remember that its strength has been in pushing for and lending support to further reforms when and where possible. It will likely take decades for Myanmar to consolidate its nascent democracy, and U.S. policymakers, both in the administration and in Congress, should continue to champion the pragmatic, long-term thinking that guided early engagement with Myanmar, rather than focusing on every slip backward along the road of reform.

Recent U.S. legislation aimed at punishing Naypyidaw for its shortcomings, followed by the extension of remaining U.S. sanctions against Myanmar under the National Security Emergency Act, have prompted some in Myanmar to wonder whether Washington is more interested in scoring a foreign policy success than in investing in long-term ties with their country.
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A strategic U.S. policy in Myanmar will be one that is not dominated by individual human rights issues at the expense of the larger picture, or by the prospect of Aung San Suu Kyi becoming president. Myanmar’s civilian and military elites as a whole understand that their interests are aligned with continuing political and economic reforms, however uneven they may appear. And the United States, whether it likes it or not, will face the task of navigating Myanmar’s uncertain political landscape following the 2015 elections. The longer Washington waits to begin planning for alternative scenarios that could play out after 2015, the harder it will be to retain the leverage and use the momentum and goodwill the administration has accumulated in the country in recent years.
**INDONESIA**

- **Election campaign launched.** Campaigning for Indonesia’s 2014 presidential election officially kicked off on June 5 with former Jakarta governor Joko “Jokowi” Widodo facing off against former general Prabowo Subianto. The campaign will officially conclude on July 5 with the election set for July 9. Recent polls have shown Jokowi’s lead shrinking to single digits, with a large number of voters still undecided. The two candidates faced off on June 9 in their first national debate, during which many commentators said Jokowi performed somewhat better than Prabowo.

- **Sectarian violence erupts in Yogyakarta.** Members of hard-line Islamic groups on June 1 attacked a Pentecostal church in northern Yogyakarta—the third recent attack against religious minorities in this special administrative region in Java. Yogyakarta is the only region of Indonesia still governed by a hereditary sultan. For years it has been subjected to surveillance by counterterrorism authorities, who in May discovered a training camp and bunker believed to be linked to a terror outfit based in Poso, Central Sulawesi.

- **Abbott visits Indonesia to repair relations.** Australian prime minister Tony Abbott met with Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on June 4 during a stopover in Indonesia en route to a 10-day visit to Europe and North America. The meeting signaled a thaw in relations, which have been strained by Australia’s policy of turning back asylum seeker boats coming from Indonesia and revelations that the Australian Embassy in Jakarta had spied on Indonesian officials.

- **Mount Sangeang Api erupts, disrupting flights.** Mount Sangeang Api, located on an uninhabited island in West Nusa Tengarra province east of Java, erupted on May 30, spewing plumes of ash. The large ash clouds forced airline companies in Australia and Indonesia, including Garuda, Qantas, and Virgin Australia, to cancel some domestic and international flights. The airport at Darwin in northern Australia was particularly affected, halting operations for an entire day after the eruption.

- **Development of largest geothermal power plant begins.** Coordinating Minister for the Economy Chairul Tanjung on May 28 announced that Indonesia will soon begin the development of the $1.6-billion Sarulla geothermal power project, hailed as the largest in the world. Chairul said the 330-megawatt project is crucial for government plans to increase the national power supply by about 60 gigawatts by 2022. Medco Power Indonesia is in charge of the project.
THAILAND

• Junta removes pro-Thaksin governors, threatens lèse-majesté crackdown. The military-run National Council for Peace and Order on June 5 removed from office 13 provincial governors in north and northeast Thailand who were viewed as supportive of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The council also transferred at least 17 top police officers in an apparent attempt to weaken Thaksin’s influence. Meanwhile, the army has threatened to use military tribunals to try anyone who violates the country’s rigid lèse-majesté laws, which forbid defaming the royal family.

• Junta moves forward on funding major infrastructure projects. The head of Thailand’s military junta, Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha, announced June 2 that the National Council for Peace and Order will move ahead with $30 billion in infrastructure projects stalled under the previous government. The junta also plans to clear a $22 billion backlog in foreign investment applications. Thailand’s consumer confidence rose for the first time in 13 months in May, which many commentators attributed to perceived stability following the May 22 military coup.

• Military responds to foreign criticism. A spokesperson for Thailand’s military junta on June 6 criticized the United States and others, such as Australia, who condemned the United States and others, such as Australia, who condemned the military’s decision to seize power. He said that Thailand’s military would remember which countries did not offer their support for the coup. The junta on June 9 ordered its ambassadors in the United States and United Kingdom to meet with representatives from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, both of which have loudly condemned the coup, in order to explain the military’s position.

• Anti-coup protests continue as “Hunger Games” salute becomes sign of resistance. Protests continued to spring up on the streets of Bangkok in early June, with demonstrators organizing over social media and quickly gathering and then dispersing. Many demonstrators by June 2 had begun employing a three-fingered salute taken from the popular science fiction series “The Hunger Games” to express their displeasure with the ruling military junta. The National Council for Peace and Order has begun arresting protesters who use the gesture.

• Thailand tops rice market once again. Thailand’s rice association announced on June 4 that the country had once again become the world’s top rice exporter, shipping nearly 4 million tons of rice from January to May. Rice prices soared under the previous government’s rice buying scheme, pushing exports down and allowing competitors Vietnam and India to take the lead. But the release of the resulting surplus onto global markets has driven Thailand’s rice prices lower than competing exporters.
MYANMAR

- Government unveils draft religious conversion bill. The Myanmar government on May 27 released the draft of a controversial bill that would require people to obtain permission from local authorities to convert to another religion. Authorities are accepting public comments on the draft, which was published in state-run newspapers. The proposed law does not mention a specific religion but is widely understood to target Buddhists converting to Islam. Violators would be sentenced to up to one year in prison, though some nationalist monks are calling for the penalty to be increased to five years.

- Gap to become first U.S. apparel company to add Myanmar to supply chain. U.S.-based clothing company Gap announced a deal on June 7 to have South Korean-owned manufacturers in Myanmar supply its Old Navy and Banana Republic stores starting in summer 2014. The contract makes Gap the first U.S. clothing company to add Myanmar to its supply chain since Washington suspended most sanctions in 2012. Gap said the deal will directly create 700 jobs in those clothing factories and indirectly create another 4,000 in Myanmar. Garments were a major industry in Myanmar, accounting for 40 percent of exports, until the United States imposed a devastating trade embargo in 2003.

- Report accuses Myanmar military of war crimes against Kachin. The international human rights group Fortify Rights released a report on June 9 detailing allegations by Kachin civilians in northern Myanmar of systematic torture by the Myanmar military. The 78 witnesses interviewed for the report told of stabbings, beatings, and other forms of torture since 2011 that Fortify Rights argues amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Presidential spokesperson Ye Htut dismissed the report’s findings and said the government of Myanmar punishes any soldiers involved in torture.

- Government to grant foreign banks operating licenses in 2014. Myanmar will grant limited operating licenses to some foreign banks by September 2014, according to official documents sent to the representative offices of 30 foreign banks in Myanmar on May 27. The licenses will allow up to 10 banks to provide loans to foreign businesses operating in Myanmar, while lending to domestic companies will require cooperation with a local bank. Government officials hope the move will help modernize the domestic banking sector and foster economic development.

- World Bank criticized for investment in hotels and real estate. The U.S. Campaign for Burma on May 27 lambasted the World Bank for a $170
million investment by its subsidiary International Finance Corporation (IFC) in upscale hotels and real estate in Myanmar. The advocacy group voiced concerns that the projects will worsen inequality in Myanmar and called for more transparency and broader-based development. The IFC’s representative in Myanmar, Vikram Kumar, defended the investment, saying investments in Myanmar’s tourist hot spots would create jobs and increase government revenue. He also noted that the IFC has invested in infrastructure, agriculture, and microfinance in Myanmar.

- **Myanmar police killed member of the Bangladesh border guard.**
  Myanmar police shot and killed a member of Bangladesh’s border guard during a May 28 clash, leading both countries to step up their security presence along the porous border. Myanmar’s Foreign Ministry blamed Bangladesh for not informing Myanmar of the border guard patrol and said police fired on the guards thinking they were armed members of the Rohingya community, which Myanmar authorities call Bengali. Bangladesh has lodged a formal protest and asked Myanmar to investigate the incident.

**SINGAPORE**

- **U.S., China, Japan trade barbs at Shangri-La Dialogue.** Senior officials from China, Japan, and the United States traded unusually blunt statements on maritime disputes in the South and East China seas during the May 30–June 1 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe opened the conference with remarks accusing China of aggression in the maritime dispute. U.S. defense secretary Chuck Hagel echoed those accusations, while the deputy chief of the general staff of China’s military, Lt. Gen Wang Guangzhong, accused Japan and the United States of ganging up on China. Shangri-La is the Asia Pacific’s largest regional security forum.

- **Blogger uses crowdfunding to fight prime ministers’ defamation suit.** Blogger Roy Ngerng Yi Ling announced on June 2 that he had successfully raised over $55,000 through crowdfunding to mount a legal defense against charges brought against him by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. Lee has alleged that a May 15 post by Ngerng accusing the prime minister of misappropriation of public funds amounts to criminal defamation. More than 1,100 people donated to Ngerng’s cause. The Singaporean government has in the past used libel cases against print publications, but Ngerng’s case is the first against an online critic.

- **Singapore delays infrastructure projects to limit inflow of foreign workers.** Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced on May 29 that the government will delay $1.6 billion worth of planned infrastructure
projects to limit the city-state’s demand for migrant labor. The move is part of government efforts to respond to growing public concerns about Singapore’s growing immigrant population and its impact on stagnant wages, rising living costs, and strains on infrastructure. The delay is expected to reduce immediate demand for migrant labor by 20,000–30,000 workers.

- **Singapore faces rare public protest over state-run pension system.** More than 2,000 people joined a June 7 protest against the Singaporean government’s perceived mishandling of its state-run pension system. The rare protest was one of the largest public showings of dissent in recent years in the tightly controlled city-state. Critics have lambasted a recent increase to the minimum savings threshold for citizens’ pension accounts and question whether retirement funds are sufficient given Singapore’s rising costs of living.

**ASEAN**

- **Commerce Secretary Pritzker makes three-nation ASEAN tour.** U.S. commerce secretary Penny Pritzker led a delegation of U.S. CEOs and members of the US-ASEAN Business Council to Vietnam, the Philippines, and Myanmar from June 2 to June 5 for meetings with heads of state, cabinet officials, and business leaders. Pritzker discussed the Trans-Pacific Partnership with Vietnamese counterparts, took part in a roundtable with Philippine entrepreneurs, and inaugurated a new commercial service office at the U.S. Embassy in Yangon. Hers was the first trip by a U.S. commerce secretary to Myanmar.

**SOUTH CHINA SEA**

- **Vietnamese boat sinks after collision with Chinese vessel.** A Vietnamese fishing boat sank on May 26 after colliding with a Chinese vessel about 18 miles from China’s drilling rig in disputed waters south of the Paracel Islands. The 10 crew members were rescued by nearby Vietnamese boats. China’s Foreign Ministry said the next day that the Vietnamese ship had caused the incident by maneuvering irresponsibly in an attempt to disrupt the Chinese vessel’s activities. But Vietnamese state media released footage on June 6 that appeared to show the Chinese vessel purposely ramming and capsizing the smaller Vietnamese boat.

- **Tribunal fixes date for China to submit counter-memorial.** The Permanent Court of Arbitration on June 4 announced that China will have until December 15 to file a memorial counteruing the Philippines’ evidence in its case against Chinese claims in the South China Sea, especially the “nine-dash line.” China’s Foreign Ministry that same day restated its refusal to
participate in the case. Philippine foreign secretary Albert del Rosario urged Beijing to reconsider its decision.

- **India’s state-owned oil company to continue to explore disputed oil blocks.** Two executives of India’s state-owned oil company ONGC Videsh indicated on June 3 that the company will renew its license with Vietnam to explore for oil and gas in block 128, off the coast of southern Vietnam. ONGC’s agreement to explore the block is set to expire in June if not renewed. The company currently holds a 100 percent stake in the block and has invested around $46 million in it. The China National Offshore Oil Corporation in 2012 offered blocks that overlap with block 128 for bidding, but the offering garnered little international interest.

- **Group of Seven expresses concerns over East and South China seas.** Heads of state from the Group of Seven—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States—issued a joint statement on June 4 expressing deep concerns over tensions in the East and South China seas. The statement opposes unilateral aggression and emphasized the primacy of international law in clarifying disputes. China’s Foreign Ministry said the next day that only nations directly affected should get involved in the disputes and external players would only further complicate the situation.

- **Vietnam**
  - **National Assembly discusses ways to reduce economic dependence on China.** Members of Vietnam’s National Assembly on June 2 raised concerns over the country’s heavy dependence on China’s economy, which they said places Vietnam at a disadvantage in its disputes in the South China Sea. Minister of Industry and Trade Vu Huy Hoang emphasized that the trade deficit with China is due to the high volume of raw materials Vietnam imports. Deputy Minister Do Thang Hai said the ministry has proposed more support for local industries and has implemented measures to boost exports through potential free trade agreements, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership, to reduce this dependence on China.

  - **Vietnam prepared to bring China to court.** Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung said May 30 that Vietnam is prepared to take legal action against China for its placement of a drilling rig in disputed waters in the South China Sea, but is still considering the timing of such a move. Deputy
Defense Minister Nguyen Chi Vinh said June 2 that China has persuaded Vietnam several times not to take the issue to court. He also announced that Japan will help train Vietnamese coast guard personnel and provide Hanoi with additional patrol vessels in 2015.

- **Court sentences tycoon to 30 years in prison.** A Vietnamese court on June 9 handed down a 30-year sentence for tycoon Nguyen Duc Kien on charges of fraud and tax evasion. Kien was cofounder of Asia Commercial Bank and is one of Vietnam’s 100 richest people. The trial against him and five other former bank executives exposed serious loopholes in Vietnam’s banking system and legal framework.

- **Vietnam reveals development plans for new economic zones.** Vietnam’s Ministry of Planning and Investment on June 5 announced plans to develop two southern economic zones through 2020. The Southern Key Economic Zone will broaden Vietnam’s electronics production and a range of services, including trade, logistics, finance, telecommunications, and tourism. The Mekong Delta Economic Zone will become a large-scale tourism and service center. The two are expected to help boost Vietnam’s per capita gross domestic product to more than $5,000 by 2020, from less than $1,600 in 2012.

**PHILIPPINES**

- **Government says Bangsamoro law on track despite delays.** Presidential spokesperson Edwin Lacierda on June 2 assured doubters that a bill to establish the Bangsamoro autonomous area in Mindanao will be sent to the Philippine Congress in time for passage by the end of 2014. Critics have accused the executive branch of taking too long to review the proposed law. The president’s office had earlier promised to deliver the bill to Congress on May 5. Lacierda said the major reason for the slow pace is that the government must ensure the bill can survive inevitable challenges to its constitutionality.

- **Three leading senators charged with plundering funds.** Government prosecutors filed charges on June 6 against Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and prominent senators José “Jinggoy” Estrada and Ramon Revilla Jr. for allegedly plundering millions of dollars of public funds allocated for infrastructure projects. Prosecutors also charged businesswoman Janet Napoles, who is accused of organizing the graft ring by setting up fake organizations to receive public funds and paying the senators kickbacks for their part. Over $45 million was allegedly misappropriated through these scams.
• **Senate approves new presidential defense procurement authority.** The Philippine Senate on June 4 granted President Benigno Aquino new powers to oversee procurement of military aircraft, vessels, and other equipment from treaty allies. The proposed amendments to the Government Procurement Reform Act would likely benefit the United States, with whom the Philippines recently signed an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. But the new procurement powers have raised eyebrows among critics who challenge the legality of the agreement with the United States.

• **Aquino issues executive order to fight coconut pest.** President Benigno Aquino on June 5 issued Executive Order 169 directing the Philippine Coconut Authority to spearhead an effort to eliminate *aspidiotus destructor rigidus*, an invasive insect species that targets coconut trees. The pest has so far only affected plants in the Calabarzon province south of Manila and parts of the southern island of Mindanao, but left untreated it could spread to the rest of the country. The Philippines is currently the world’s top supplier of coconut products, employing 3.5 million farmers and bringing in $2 billion in foreign profits.

MALAYSIA

• **Najib focuses on trade during China visit.** Prime Minister Najib Razak met with Chinese president Xi Jinping on May 30 during a six-day visit to China that focused heavily on the countries’ trade and investment relationship. The two leaders committed to increasing bilateral trade 60 percent by 2017, to about $170 billion. They avoided much discussion of recent tensions, especially over the South China Sea and Kuala Lumpur’s handling of the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight 370. Najib did raise some eyebrows by signing onto a joint statement that, in the Chinese version at least, asserted that the involvement of outside parties only heightens tensions in the South China Sea.

• **Ruling coalition wins by-election.** The ruling Barisan Nasional coalition’s candidate, a member of the Gerakan party, edged out controversial opposition candidate Dyana Sofyan in a May 31 by-election in western Malaysia, winning by just 238 votes. The by-election sparked a vigorous debate about race and politics in the country, as Dyana, a young Malay woman, chose to run as a member of the Democratic Action Party, traditionally seen as a vehicle for Chinese Malaysians, rather than the ruling United Malays National Organization. Commentators blamed her loss on poor voter turnout of about 67 percent, down from 80 percent during the 2012 general election.
Najib launches defamation suit against popular online news portal. Prime Minister Najib Razak and his ruling United Malays National Organization launched a defamation suit against online news site Malaysiakini and two of its editors, presenting them with a writ of summons on June 3. Najib accuses Malaysiakini of allowing readers to post defamatory statements about him on the site's comments section. Malaysiakini, which is often critical of the government, said it intends to fight the suit. Najib is seeking damages, an injunction against further defamatory content, and an apology from the site. Court proceedings will start on June 18.

Cadbury products certified as pig DNA-free. The Malaysian Islamic Development Department on June 2 released test results that showed that UK-based Cadbury products made in Malaysia are free of any traces of pig DNA. The test results contradicted earlier findings from the Ministry of Health that sparked outrage among Islamist groups in Malaysia and a large-scale boycott of Cadbury products. Malaysian officials have not ruled out the possibility of cross-contamination as the cause of the initial results.

CAMBODIA

Union representatives charged with inciting violence. A provincial court on May 25 charged eight union representatives with incitement for taking part in garment factory strikes for a higher minimum wage and better working conditions. They join 11 other labor leaders charged by Cambodian courts in May. Another court meanwhile convicted 23 workers who were arrested during a crackdown on strikes in January, but the court surprised observers by suspending their sentences and releasing them immediately after the trial. The court decisions came as government officials met with major clothing brands including H&M and Puma, which expressed concerns about labor rights in Cambodia and threatened to shift production elsewhere.

Phnom Penh demands Thailand remove fence near disputed temple. Cambodia on June 2 demanded that Thailand remove a fence erected by the new military junta a few days earlier near the disputed Preah Vihear temple. Cambodian foreign affairs spokesperson Koy Kuong called the fence a violation of a 2000 agreement to preserve the status quo around the border temple. The International Court of Justice in 2013 ruled that the temple and disputed land near it belongs to Cambodia.
An opium poppy field in Nong Het district in northern Laos. Growing opium poppies is becoming more common among farmers in border areas between Laos and Myanmar due to rising regional demand and a lack of profitable alternative crops. https://www.flickr.com/photos/9194595@N07/1498240407/

- **Anti-sex-trafficking hero resigns after *Newsweek* investigation.** Anti-sex-trafficking activist Somaly Mam resigned from the foundation that bears her name on May 28 after a *Newsweek* investigation questioned details of her life story. Mam’s autobiography claims she was sold into sex slavery as a child, but residents of her childhood village told *Newsweek* she lived a normal life. Sales of the book have generated millions of dollars for the Somaly Mam Foundation. The foundation helped more than 10,000 sex workers in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in 2012, according to its annual report.

**LAOS**

- **Chinese contractor to help Laos launch first satellite in 2015.** Lao state media on May 27 reported that China Asia-Pacific Mobile Telecommunications Satellite Company and another, unnamed Chinese company will launch Laos’s first satellite in 2015. The Lao government reached a $250 million agreement for the launch with the two Chinese contractors in 2011. The satellite, which will be launched into an orbital slot of 128.5 degrees, will transmit data for television and telephone services.

- **Opium production in Laos, Myanmar quickly rising to meet regional demand.** The Netherlands-based Transnational Institute said June 2 that opium poppy cultivation has rapidly expanded in the Lao and Myanmar portions of the “Golden Triangle,” partly due to fresh demand for heroin in new markets in China and India. Laos’s production is centered in the northern provinces of Phongsali and Houaphan, which border China and Vietnam respectively. Cross-border attempts to ban opium production have driven farmers deeper into poverty, which has contributed to the recent resurgence of illicit cultivation.

**BRUNEI**

- **U.S. lawmakers urge use of TPP to address Brunei’s human rights record.** At least 24 U.S. lawmakers, mostly Democrats, had signed a draft letter by May 29 urging U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman and Secretary of State John Kerry to ensure that human rights issues in Brunei are addressed during the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations. The letter follows the introduction of shari’a law in Brunei on May 1, which includes harsh penalties such as stoning for homosexuality and adultery.

**TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP**

- **Democrats urge labor protections in TPP for Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam, Mexico.** Most Democratic lawmakers in the House of Representatives—153 out of 199—sent a letter to U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman on
May 29 urging him to ensure that protection for workers’ rights in Brunei, Malaysia, Mexico, and Vietnam is included in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations. The letter is the latest sign of Democrats’ aversion to the deal. Froman’s office responded that the United States is working to ensure that strong, enforceable protections for workers are at the core of the TPP.
Looking Ahead

• **Benefit concert for the Philippines.** The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts will host “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.

• **Discussion on conflict resolution in Asia.** The Asia Foundation will host a discussion June 17 on the organization’s work on conflict resolution in the Asia Pacific. Regional Director for Conflict and Development Patrick Barron will offer an overview of the foundation’s relevant work, including its 2013 *Contested Corners of Asia* study. For further details, please contact Ellie Matthews.

• **Release of Global Peace Index.** The CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation and the Institute for Economics and Peace will cohost a launch on June 18 of the *2014 Global Peace Index*, which looks at the state of global peace by measuring country risk and opportunity. An expert panel will discuss the report’s findings regarding threats to global peace. The event will take place from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. in the CSIS Second Floor Conference Room, 1616 Rhode Island Ave, NW. For more information, please [click here](#).

• **Discussion on political legitimacy in Southeast Asia.** The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace will host Muthiah Alagappa on June 18 for a discussion of the challenge of political legitimacy in Southeast Asia. Alagappa will examine the strains on political systems in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, among others. The event will take place from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Carnegie Endowment, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW. Please [click here](#) to RSVP.

• **Congress’s view of the U.S. role in the Asia Pacific.** The CSIS Series on Congress and Defense will host a discussion on June 19 with representatives Randy Forbes (R-VA) and Colleen Hanabusa (D-HI) titled “Sustaining America’s Enduring Role in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Congressional Perspective.” CSIS president and CEO John Hamre will offer opening remarks and welcome the two representatives, both of whom sit on the House Armed Services Committee. The event will be held from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. at 1616 Rhode Island Ave, NW. To RSVP, please [click here](#).

• **Annual CSIS South China Sea conference.** The CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies will hold its fourth annual South China
Sea conference on July 10–11. The conference will feature keynote remarks by a leading member of Congress and a senior administration official along with top political, security, and legal experts from nine countries with an interest in the South China Sea. Registration is not yet open, but further details will follow.

- **Seminar on cultures of the Mekong River basin.** The Smithsonian Associates will host an all-day seminar on 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
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