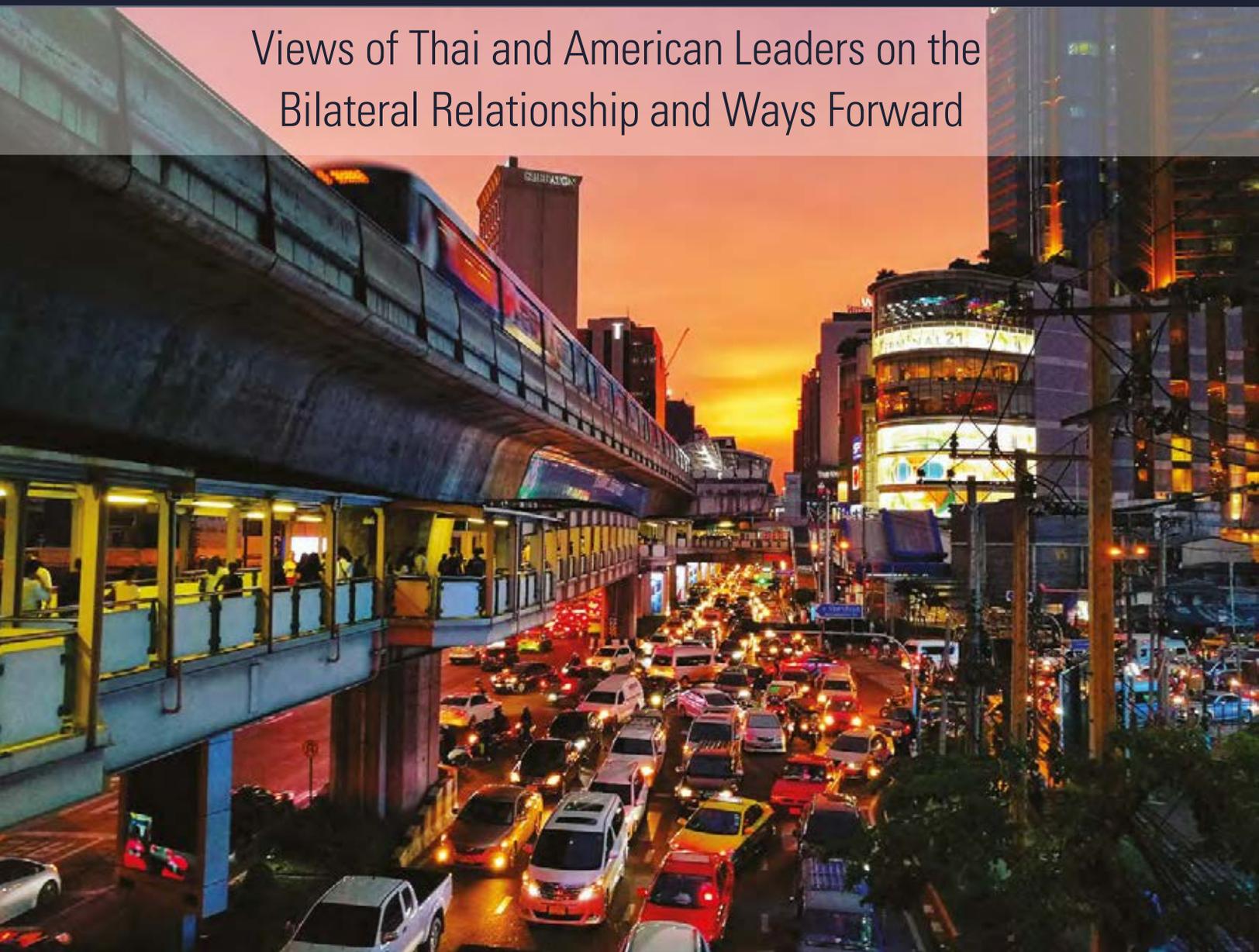


# THE FUTURE OF THAI-U.S. RELATIONS

Views of Thai and American Leaders on the  
Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward



**The Asia Foundation**

White Paper  
Project to Strengthen Relations between Thailand and the United States  
August 2018

# **The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations**

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Contents

Acknowledgements ..... 3

Executive Summary..... 4

I. Introduction and Project Overview..... 6

II. Research Findings: Interviews with Thai and U.S. Leaders ..... 8

III. Outcomes from the Bilateral Dialogue .....24

IV. Strategic Recommendations .....34

V. Conclusions and Next Steps.....38

Annex – Dialogue Agenda ..... 39

The Future of Thai-U.S. Relations: Views of Thai and American Leaders on the Bilateral Relationship and Ways Forward  
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## Acknowledgements

This project has brought together a wide community of Thai and American leaders who share a common goal of improving the bilateral relationship for the future. The Asia Foundation’s goal in this project is to help these leaders recalibrate the current relationship to the changing economic, political, and technological dynamics in Asia today.

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The co-authors of this report are Thomas Parks and Benjamin Zawacki. Cover photograph is attributed to Kaptan Jungteerapanich.

This publication reflects the views expressed through the research and dialogue described in this report and do not necessarily represent the views of the Asia Foundation, or the organizations that supported this initiative.

## Executive Summary

After a few challenging years, the bilateral relationship between the United States and Thailand is showing clear signs of improvement. Senior-level visits in 2017, expanded military engagement, and a notable warming in official statements illustrate progress in official relations. Both governments have also expanded official outreach efforts, such as the *Great and Good Friends* commemoration of 200 years of Thai-U.S. relations.

These positive developments provide an important window of opportunity to strengthen the relationship at a time of rapid geopolitical change. Despite recent improvements, the bilateral relationship is emerging from a low point. Changes in the geopolitical context are accelerating, particularly with China's growing influence in the region, and expanding engagement by other major powers. Given these changes, it is an important moment to reinvigorate the U.S.-Thailand alliance to be more relevant for the emerging geopolitical context in Asia.

This initiative, led by the Asia Foundation, was designed to strengthen the bilateral relationship between the United States and Thailand. The project included interviews with 50 leaders from the U.S. and Thailand, and a bilateral dialogue (track 1.5) between Thai and U.S. delegations in Washington in July 2018. The interviews provided a useful articulation of the broad spectrum of views on the current status of the Thai-U.S. relationship, drawing on lessons from the recent past. The bilateral dialogue provided a forum to develop specific, actionable recommendations for improving relations. Key recommendations include:

1. *Shape the Indo-Pacific Strategy* - As the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) begins to take shape, Thai leaders are concerned about how Thailand will be affected, yet encouraged by more strategic U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia. The U.S. should work with Thailand to shape the FOIP strategy to be complementary and mutually beneficial by taking into consideration ASEAN and Thai concerns. Thailand should further facilitate inputs as the FOIP evolves, both individually and in its role as ASEAN Chair in 2019.
2. *The Mekong River as a shared strategic interest* - The United States should regard the Mekong River as a key area of shared strategic interest with Thailand. The Mekong River will likely be a critical area for future cooperation, not only on development and economic integration, but also on security and geopolitical issues. Thailand should work with the United States to find meaningful entry points for U.S. engagement.
3. *Increase the strategic value of U.S. ODA to the region* - The United States should adapt U.S. Official Development Assistance (ODA) to be more strategically relevant for the bilateral relationship, U.S. engagement in the Lower Mekong Sub-region, and the FOIP strategy in Southeast Asia. U.S. ODA should work through existing initiatives, increase focus on regional connectivity, and work more closely with Thailand on shared regional development priorities. The U.S. should also review and re-orient the Lower Mekong Initiative to be a more significant vehicle for political, development and security initiatives in the region.
4. *Expand Thai participation in IMET after the election* - After planned 2019 elections are held, Thailand should proactively expand engagement with the U.S. International Military

Education and Training (IMET) program. The United States should resume making IMET funds available to Thai students, and expand and promote their participation in the program. Expanded Thai participation in IMET will be crucial to address the shifting perceptions within the Thai military regarding U.S. intentions in the region, and ongoing U.S. concerns about inter-operability and civil-military relations in Thailand.

5. *Support Thailand as ASEAN Chair in 2019* - The United States should prioritize support for Thailand during its role as ASEAN Chair in 2019. Both nations have a strong interest in Thailand taking full advantage of 2019 to strengthen its leadership in the region.
6. *Enhance Thai engagement in Washington* - Thailand should aim to broaden and deepen its engagement in Washington. This can be achieved through longer tours for Thai diplomats, expanded opportunities for Thai diplomats to learn about the U.S., expanded and more strategic engagement with the U.S. Congress, and more support for diplomats to network with American officials and knowledgeable citizens.
7. *Promote U.S. values with greater recognition and awareness of Thai perceptions* - The United States should promote democracy and the rule of law with more sensitivity to local context, and avoid actions that could be perceived as interference in Thai politics. Although Thai leaders across the political spectrum generally accept the role of U.S. values in the bilateral relationship, there is broad resistance to a “one size fits all” approach that only focuses on elections, and belies the importance and depth of U.S.-Thailand relations.
8. *Digital technology as a key priority for expanded cooperation* - Thailand and the United States should actively expand policy engagement on digital technology, cybersecurity, social media, and promotion of innovation. The Thai Government should increase engagement with American technology companies to help create a conducive ecosystem for the incubation and growth of Thai start-ups. The U.S. Commerce Department’s new Digital Attaché program could be helpful in sharing advice, best practices, key performance indicators, and lessons learned.
9. *Advance trade negotiations and resolve lingering issues* - Thailand and the U.S. should resolve lingering trade issues and consider reopening FTA negotiations. With disruptions in global trade beginning to affect the region, the stakes are higher now for both countries to reset the trade relationship. Renewed progress on the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) serves as an important basis for more far-reaching negotiations.
10. *Improve mutual understanding through education and scholarship* - The Thai government, foundations, and private sector should increase support for research on the United States and re-establish American Studies programs at Thai universities in Bangkok and throughout the country. The U.S. Government should continue its support of Southeast Asian Studies and languages and consider increasing its support given the region's importance to the US's political, economic, and security interests. U.S. universities, foundations, and the private sector should encourage the renewal of Southeast Asia area studies and language programs in American universities. Both nations should also seek to reverse the steady decline in the numbers of their students studying in the other’s secondary schools and universities.

## I. Introduction and Project Overview

The 200-year relationship between the United States and Thailand is rich in political and diplomatic history, steadfast military cooperation, extensive economic links, and genuine friendship between peoples. The history of the relationship has been punctuated with extraordinary moments, such as King Mongkut's offer of elephants to President Buchanan in 1861; President Lincoln's response with the memorable salutation "Great and Good Friend"; America's role in preventing British demands for reparation and Thai territory at the end of the war; Cold War defense agreements in 1954 and 1962; and visits by Thailand's royal family to America in the 1960s. The Thai-U.S. partnership has been a crucial source of stability and reassurance in the region, including humanitarian efforts for millions of refugees beginning in 1979, response to the 2004 Pacific Tsunami, and ongoing Cobra Gold joint military exercises since 1982.

Three periods of uncertainty, however, have also challenged the relationship: U.S. military departure from mainland Southeast Asia in the mid-1970s, Thailand's financial crisis in the late 1990s, and strained relations in the aftermath of the 2014 *coup d'état*. Recent years have been characterized by political divisions in both countries, which has had a clear impact on the bilateral relationship. For the past decade, relations have been shaken by expressions of concern and even criticism by both countries, particularly as Thailand experienced a prolonged political crisis. In October 2016, Thailand longest-reigning, universally-loved and revered monarch King Bhumibol passed away. As the kingdom experienced a year of profound mourning, Americans were deeply saddened by the loss of a true friend and towering figure, whose birth in Massachusetts presaged a life-long connection between Thailand and the United States.

Yet, not unlike in the past, the present period of uncertainty between the two treaty allies is giving way to renewed ties and trust. Since mid-2017, a series of senior U.S. military and administration officials have visited Thailand, and in October, Thai Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha undertook an official visit to the White House. Earlier this year, Cobra Gold was returned to pre-*coup* levels of participation, and Thailand's defense minister visited the Pentagon. Throughout this time, developments on the Korean Peninsula have seen a united U.S. and Thai voice in support of denuclearization. Adversarial commentary on Thai social media has receded, while the jointly sponsored exhibit, "Great and Good Friends: 200 Years of Thai-U.S. Friendship," received tens of thousands of visitors in Bangkok.

Continued improvement is necessary, given the rapid pace of change in the region and concerns that the bilateral relationship needs a new shared vision for the future. Changes in the geopolitical context are accelerating, particularly with China's growing influence in the region, and expanding engagement by other major powers. The perceived shift in U.S. foreign policy towards a stronger interest-based emphasis (and reduced priority on values), and the unfolding changes in U.S. trade policy, create a new set of parameters for defining shared strategic interests and new opportunities and challenges for the bilateral relationship.

As the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy begins to take shape, Thai leaders are concerned about how Thailand will be affected—particularly given its geostrategic position in Southeast Asia—yet encouraged by more strategic U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia. Some Thai leaders are concerned that the U.S. alliance structure in Asia is in flux, especially with the establishment of

the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (U.S., Japan, Australia, India). Given these changes, it is an important moment to reinvigorate the treaty alliance with Thailand, to be more relevant for the emerging geopolitical context in Asia toward mutual and regional multi-lateral benefits.

Since August 2017, The Asia Foundation has been conducting a project designed to better understand and strengthen the relationship between the United States and Thailand. As an international relations organization with extensive networks in both countries, and a 64-year history of supporting engagement between their governments and peoples, the Foundation is in an ideal position to undertake this effort.

The Foundation conducted a study on the views of American and Thai leaders who have shaped the bilateral relationship over the past half century. The intention of the study is to articulate a broad spectrum of views on the current status of the Thai-U.S. relationship, drawing on lessons from the recent past. The study is based on interviews with 50 leaders, who collectively represent the political, diplomatic, security, economic (private and public), and academic sectors. Interviewees also represent the various political factions in Thailand, and both Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. Chapter II of this report contains a synthesis of findings from these interviews. Many of the positions described are contested, and as such, the research team sought to articulate areas of agreement and dissent among interviewees. Given the passage of time and bilateral developments, some of the views expressed during interviews may be dated.

Upon the advice of the Advisory Panel, the Foundation supported research by the American Studies Association of Thailand (ASAT) on the views of Thai young people on the U.S. and Thai-U.S. relations. Many experts have argued that younger generations in Thailand generally have different views of America compared to their parents and are much less aware of the depth and longevity of the Thai-U.S. relationship. The findings of that study are available in a separate study from ASAT, completed in July 2018.

The project's second phase was a track 1.5 dialogue between Thai and U.S. leaders in Washington, DC, on July 17-19, 2018. The bilateral dialogue aimed to strengthen ties among a broad spectrum of key Thai and U.S. leaders in government, think tanks, universities, and the private sector, by focusing on the future of bilateral relations. The delegates reflected a diversity of views—across generations, professions, and political associations—within each country. While designed as a non-official event to allow for frank and open discussion, the dialogue included relevant Thai and U.S. government officials. The track 1.5 format, following Chatham House rules, also allowed for a more diverse set of participants, including those outside of government and policy-making circles who could contribute ideas and experience. The outcomes and recommendations from the bilateral dialogue are captured in chapter III of this report.

Finally, chapter IV of this report contains a set of strategic recommendations that are based on findings from the study, and outcomes of the bilateral dialogue.

## II. Research Findings: Interviews with Thai and U.S. Leaders

Following ten months of in-depth interviews with 50 individuals from the U.S. and Thailand, the research team identified assumptions underlying the interviewees' commentary, explored whether the U.S.-Thailand bilateral relationship was in decline, and analyzed the geopolitical context affecting bilateral relations.

### Underlying Assumptions

This project aimed to identify any assumptions underlying the views of American and Thai interlocutors regarding the U.S.-Thai relationship. Some of the assumptions were clearly expressed and readily acknowledged by interviewees. Others were implicit in the way particular questions were answered. All were held either by a majority of stakeholders on the U.S. and/or Thai side, or by a significant minority. 29 underlying assumptions were identified. 14 of them were held in highly similar and/or complementary form by Americans and Thais alike. This commonality, including on negative aspects of the relationship, is encouraging in pointing to areas for immediate follow-up action. The remaining 15 underlying assumptions were generally held by either the U.S. or Thai side. All illustrate differences in certain "starting points" of American and Thai interlocutors.

The 14 similar and complementary assumptions underlying the input of American and Thai interviewees were:

1. *The overall U.S. response to the 2014 coup damaged the U.S.-Thai relationship.* This was noted by the vast majority of interviewees, even by Americans and Thais who otherwise took a strong anti-*coup* position. Particular emphasis was placed on the messaging—the way in which disagreement with the *coup* was publicly communicated. Both sides understood that relevant U.S. law obligated a negative response, but even most in agreement with the law held that it could have been more constructively implemented. Thai interviewees often noted the contrasting U.S. response to Egypt's *coup d'état* in 2013, and some Thais were plainly indignant in condemning what they perceived as double standards. Thais frequently expressed that the U.S. needs a better understanding of the specifics of the situation leading up to the coup.
2. *The historical aspect of the U.S.-Thai relationship is not nearly as relevant or influential as it once was.* Although both Americans and Thais advised a rekindling of memories of the Free Thai Movement, the Cold War alliance, and the late king's connections to the U.S., they agreed that they mean less at the current time, than during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even older generation contributors saw history as providing no more than a positive backdrop to future cooperation.
3. *The U.S.-Thai relationship has suffered from a decline in the number and depth of personal relationships.* Both sides acknowledged the unusual geopolitical circumstances that had once given rise to so many Americans in Thailand and their long periods of service. But Americans especially lamented the practical effects of a lack of personal connections to draw upon, especially when requesting Thai support or encouraging U.S. values. Thais

regretted the absence of a “personal touch” in their interaction with Americans in both the public and private sectors.

4. *Younger and middle generation Thais know less about the past and present U.S.-Thai relationship than do older Thais, and are more ambivalent about the U.S..* Thais pointed particularly to people in “mid-career” and younger – those who do not readily recall the Cold War era. Both sides acknowledge that American political and popular culture (via movies, television series, the internet, advertising) remains a major influence. (*Note: In July 2018, the American Studies Association of Thailand released a separate report, intended as an input into the bilateral dialogue, on the views of Thai young people on the U.S. and U.S.-Thai relations.*)
5. *A large “reservoir” of goodwill still exists among older Thais for the U.S. and for Americans.* Americans did not perceive this to the same degree as did Thais, and it clearly suggested a “finite resource” and attrition as time goes on. At the same time, it balanced the assumptions on history and personal relationships, and encouraged efforts at renewing ties. From the Thai perspective, the U.S.’s positive and constructive role in the past has the potential to foster positive feeling and increased trust towards the U.S.. For example, undertakings by descendants of Free Thai Movement members have been successful in creating awareness amongst the younger generation of the positive role of the U.S..
6. *There is still an important role for U.S. foreign policy values of governance, human rights, and the rule of law in the U.S.-Thai relationship.* Among both Americans and Thais, this assumption fell on a wide spectrum, ranging from a very limited to a rather prominent role for values. Americans noted that the current Trump administration tended toward a lesser role and linked its current de-emphasis to promoting values more selectively and effectively. Others promoted taking a more principled—even uncompromising—line on values in Thailand. A few interviewees (including Thai and American) argued that American values are an asset that, on balance, helps to strengthen relations, when used constructively. Views likewise varied among Thais mostly along political lines, with more conservative elements advocating a limited role for values, and anti-*coup* voices in favor of a larger one. Thais tended to agree, however, that the U.S.’s ability to effectively promote its values depended upon it doing so consistently, both in Thailand and elsewhere in the world. Most Thais agree on such universal values. No interviewees expressed opposition to such values and many highlighted the enduring value. What was not appreciated, according to Thai interviewees, was the confrontational way in which the messages were conveyed. Hence, it is a matter of adjusting the method of presentation rather the substance of the values.
7. *While defense cooperation and the U.S.-Thai alliance are important sources of strength, the future of the relationship requires greater balance across all areas of cooperation.* Several Thai leaders argued that the bilateral relationship means more than a military pact. Furthermore, President Trump has downplayed alliances. This was flagged by Americans more as a past and potentially future challenge, than as a reason or incentive to re-conceptualize or reinvigorate the alliance. For Thais, often citing bilateral economic disputes in the mid-1980s and late-1990s, it contradicted a diminishment of the relationship’s historical elements, but supported the assumption (below) of continued geopolitical importance.

8. *Both sides are partly responsible for the decline of the U.S.-Thai relationship.* Americans generally agreed that the U.S. shoulders more of the blame, but also pointed to Thailand's ongoing political crisis, including two *coups d'état* and six changes in prime minister since 2006. Thais likewise consistently assigned the majority of responsibility to the U.S., but readily acknowledged that Thailand's domestic troubles have hindered its capacity to fully engage.
9. *Internal political divisions in both Thailand and the U.S. have complicated the U.S.-Thai relationship.* Americans recognized (as they did in the mid-1970s) that they can no longer speak of Thailand's leadership or the Thai people as a monolithic, much less unified, entity. For some Thai interviewees, this partly explained—and occasionally excused—American actions during political crises. Likewise, both sides acknowledged that political polarization in the U.S., both between and within major parties, has made speaking with a “single voice” on Thailand difficult.
10. *Thailand's status within ASEAN has declined over the past decade, which has had regional implications (including with China) and has affected its relations with a U.S. that often sees Thailand in a regional context.* This view was held more firmly by Americans than by Thais (who often cited their domestic situation), but both sides regretted the change in perception of Thailand as a clear regional leader to a less prominent player.
11. *Thailand's geopolitical significance is largely tied to its role as a Southeast Asian power and ASEAN.* Americans assigned geopolitical importance to Thailand largely on account of its place within a region ripe for greater attention and within ASEAN. Thai perspectives were similar but took on a more positive and solicitous tone. Both sides readily referenced China.
12. *U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has had a negative impact symbolically, economically, and geo-politically.* Americans varied in where such negativity was felt most keenly among the three areas. Thais noted how close their government was to joining the TPP after delayed but considerable U.S. advocacy. Both sides readily cited China's economic power and influence, both in Thailand itself and via the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and Belt and Road Initiative.
13. *The Trump administration offers a fresh start.* Americans and Thais varied much among themselves and between each other on what such a change might mean. Those in favor of the Trump administration and its greater emphasis on interests over values, saw it in positive terms; opponents were more tepid. Most Americans, across the political spectrum, saw a clear distinction between his administration's approach and those that preceded it. Thais tended toward a continuum, agreeing that Trump is more transactional but tracing increasing U.S. emphasis on interests over “friendship” back to the mid-1980s, the 1997 financial crisis, the War on Terror. Yet, both sides welcomed change for its own sake after several years of political stalemate.
14. *Reinvigoration of the U.S.-Thai relationship must have a stronger storyline on shared economic growth and technology.* Interviewees from Thailand and the U.S. agreed that there is a clear need for economic cooperation, trade, and business relationships to be at the core of a reinvigorated partnership. However, given the economic presence of China and other emerging economies, most interviewees were uncertain about the prospects for continued U.S. strength in this area. The U.S. is declining in relative terms on investment,

and largely absent from the current Thai Government's flagship growth scheme, the Eastern Economic Corridor. Several respondents pointed to the digital economy, technology, and social media as the most promising sectors for growth, especially in view of the current government's "Thailand 4.0" initiative.

The 15 underlying assumptions held separately by American and Thai interviewees were:

United States:

1. *In Washington, Thailand has largely disappeared from the foreign policy agenda.* Americans varied as to when this began, but generally agreed that it is mostly on account of neglect, indifference, and distraction. This suggests that the tension associated with relations in the wake of two *coups* has not helped to keep Thailand on the agenda.
2. *The U.S. has been overly focused on the Middle East for too long.* This was generally noted in zero-sum terms vis-à-vis Thailand, the region, and even China, and in reference to Obama's "pivot" to Asia. It was not clear whether such began in 1991, 2001, or 2003, or whether recent interest and initiatives by Trump signal a meaningful and lasting change in direction.
3. *Military relations remain the strongest aspect of the U.S.-Thai relationship, and the U.S. military its strongest proponent.* Some Americans pointed out the irony in post-*coup* sanctions being focused (twice in the past 12 years) on military relations. Others pointed out that such relations are in fact best-placed to "absorb" sanctions, and that their effects are mostly political and economic.
4. *U.S. political culture has a strong preference for elected governments.* This was seen as transcending individual presidents' engagement with foreign leaders, and differences in emphasis on interests versus values. It also spoke to the importance of elections taking place in Thailand soon, and to the continuing influence of Congress on the relationship.
5. *The U.S. tends to focus on its values in countries that are less important to critical U.S. strategic interests.* Generally accepted among Americans, this was pure *realpolitik*, suggesting that the U.S. prioritizes principles in countries where its national interests are less pertinent. This statement was offered as an explanation for differing U.S. reactions to *coups* in Thailand and Egypt. It also represents an acknowledgement that Thailand may be increasing in perceived relevance to U.S. strategic interests, particularly in relation to China's influence in Southeast Asia. A few Thai interviewees challenged the notion of interests versus values, focusing instead on the insistence of values without consideration to the context.
6. *Thailand's leadership and people no longer view China as a nation negatively.* This was often spoken in contrasting reference to the Cold War and to China's impressive economic growth and emergence as a global power. This was not the same as Thais viewing China in a clearly positive light, but suggested a greater openness dating back to the turn of the century.
7. *Thailand has clearly pivoted toward China.* There was agreement that economics accounts for the strongest and deepest relations, followed by other areas. Otherwise, views varied widely as to the shift's beginning and longevity, and its reasons and effects. Also in dispute

was how much Thailand has pro-actively pivoted in China's direction, versus being pressured to do so by China's rise.

### Thailand:

1. *Thailand allied itself with the U.S. during the Cold War based on shared political ideology and common interests, but there has been more scope for discretion and deliberation since its conclusion.* Most Thais held this view objectively and as a result of geopolitical history, referencing not only China but also other nations in South and Northeast Asia and the Pacific.
2. *Thailand does not wish and cannot afford to see the U.S.-Thai relationship decline further.* Thai interviewees gave a host of economic, security, geopolitical, and other reasons for this, often claiming a need and desire to balance between competing powers. Some Thais restated the oft-cited "bamboo diplomacy", whereby Thailand has allegedly swayed side-to-side toward one or another prevailing power. Others were keen to explain that Thailand perceives itself as a small nation which does not benefit by adhering to "extreme" ideology or political stance, but believes in taking a "middle path".
3. *Younger Thais remain attracted to the American "way of life".* This spoke to aspects of U.S. popular—as opposed to political—culture that affect and appeal to a new generation of Thais. It signaled a continuation and evolution of the same "soft power" that initially took hold during the Vietnam War era. It includes Hollywood movies, U.S. musical acts, Starbucks coffee and café culture, Google, Facebook and social media, Apple products and technology trends, and fitness fashion by Nike and others.
4. *The U.S. should work more closely with allies such as Japan and Australia to jointly strengthen relations with Thailand.* Thais frequently mentioned Japan and Australia as potential nations in balancing China's influence, in cooperation with the U.S.. The Japanese way of life and the closeness via business links with Thais, as well as the close relations between the Thai Monarchy and Japanese Emperor were mentioned. A U.S.-Japan alliance to foster stronger relations both with Thailand and ASEAN was suggested.
5. *The U.S.-Thai relationship remains strong.* While some Thais pointed out robust connections at the level of military affairs, intelligence, and economics, many were not clear or specific in what they meant by this assertion. It often registered as a vote of confidence or article of faith. But it qualified the widely stated assumption that the relationship is in decline.
6. *The U.S. "understands" Thailand less than it once did.* This word, increasingly used by Thais of all backgrounds and political affiliations since 2006, carried different meanings ranging from sympathy (usually for one's political persuasion), to personal investment (via relationships and longevity), to intellectual comprehension. This variance makes it difficult to draw meaning from the assumption, but its ubiquity cannot be ignored. The general sentiment is that the level of mutual understanding that came from close working relations during World War II and the decades that followed were significant in facilitating trust and cooperation in the past. Many Thai interviewees are concerned that U.S. understanding of Thailand is in long-term decline, with major implications for future relations.

7. *Thailand and Southeast Asia are less important to the U.S. than the Middle East and Northeast Asia.* This assumption, complementing two in the U.S.-only ledger (above), was accepted and expressed matter-of-factly by most Thais. It did not contradict the view that Thailand and the region remain geopolitically important, but was a clear-eyed comparative conclusion.
8. *China is an undeniable and comprehensive presence in Thailand and Southeast Asia, that has provided Thailand with an alternative multi-faceted relationship.* This assumption, also complementing two in the U.S.-only ledger (above), referenced both history and a new reality. Views varied on the nature of Chinese influence on Thailand and the region, from benign to inevitable to pernicious. Several Thai interviewees noted the “creeping influence” and prevalence of Chinese “soft diplomacy” based on cultural and historical ties.

### ***Notable Quotes***

The interviews generated many notable quotes that illustrate some of the prevailing views. Among them were:

“Thais of my generation recall the positive historical relationship and have a deep reservoir of goodwill towards the U.S.. We remember how the U.S. treated us as a non-enemy after World War II and saved us from British colonial designs.” - Anand Panyarachun

“Thailand does not want to be China’s adversary, so U.S.-China tension causes problems. We walk a tight-rope between powerful nations.” - Prominent Thai academic

“For U.S. values to play a role in Thailand, they should be first promoted by exemplifying them in the U.S. itself, which has not been the case over the past two decades and has resulted in less moral authority. Second, promotion should be done with more sensitivity to the fact that Thais have options and alternatives in a way they did not before. And third, any U.S. role should be preceded by a pragmatic and honest assessment of whether the promotion of values can truly influence outcomes in a positive way.” - Jim Stent

“China has the AIIB, One Belt One Road, and other regional initiatives. It puts money where its mouth is and wants to be number one.” - Kasit Piromya

“Geographically speaking, Thailand is a bridge between two oceans, a hub of the region and ASEAN, around which most major powers can reach all others within six hours.” - Prominent Thai academic

“China plays a long game and so will achieve its objectives slowly; the U.S. changes target every time it changes president.” - Prominent Thai academic

“Deep divisions in Thailand make it difficult for any nation to navigate the shoals, to neither take a side nor be seen as taking a side. The relationship is simply harder than it once was, even without another suitor in China. Before, there was essentially one Thai elite and one major power in the U.S.; now there are two of each.” - Kobsak Chutikul

“Thais sentimentally expect more from the U.S. than from others.” - Kobsak Chutikul

“Surprising is not China’s economic footprint in Thailand, but given their proximity, that the footprint isn’t bigger.” - Prominent Thai business leader

“Thais need and welcome good U.S.-China relations, as the U.S. is judged in Thailand by how much it forces Thailand to choose between the two powers.” - Prominent Thai business leader

“China is creeping in and creating a web of dependency via economic power and culture.” - Prominent Thai academic

“The notion that all American diplomats are fungible has adversely affected U.S. relations with complex countries like Thailand.” - Jeffrey Race

“The U.S. thrived in Thailand during a unique and unnatural time after World War II that is gone and not coming back. The focus must be on the future, a new era.” - Skip Boyce

“On the one hand, as Kissinger told us, it is about national interests and not friendship. Yet given how long common national interests existed, a perception of friendship between the U.S. and Thailand rose and eventually fell. One cannot deny that the friendship element has been lost. Now, the same in reverse is happening with China: interests are appearing as friendship.” - Senior Thai official

“Deep down in many ways, Thailand really is in trouble, as there has been and continues to be so much transition.... So, we need help on the ground and the Chinese are here and doing almost everything right in Southeast Asia at the moment.” - Senior Thai official

“Thais are pragmatic, not dogmatic, and are good at improvising.” - Anand Panyarachun

“We are shopping around for a future economic landscape.” - Krisda Piampongsant

“Since the end of the Cold War, the relationship has been on autopilot with neither nation putting forth a lot of effort, a kind of drift into irrelevance for both sides.” - Eric John

“The U.S. has the law, but we should be able to run values-based diplomacy without using it as a sledgehammer when it should be a scalpel. It can’t just be ‘*coups* are bad, vote now.’” - Eric John

“Both sides want to like each other, which is frankly not always the case in bilateral relationships. That is something you either have or don’t, and we have it, so things are more than half-way there.” - Eric John

“Yes the U.S.-Thailand relationship has deteriorated, but the U.S. was and remains a tall building, so the deterioration is relative.” - Somyod Tangmeelap

“Studying in U.S. military institutes is still valued by Thailand it but has lost its glamour relative to what it once was, and turning IMET on and off has had a negative impact on relations.” - Mark Kustra

“Since the end of the Cold War, both sides have reminded the other of the alliance only when they need something.” - Former diplomat and academic

“We are a prisoner to the statutes after *coups d'etat*.” - Karl Jackson

“Thailand has gone off the radar completely in the United States. You don’t read much about Thailand in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Economist*. If something strategic is going on in Thailand right now, it’s under the radar.” - Former U.S. Senator

“The U.S. can no longer just verbally promote democracy. It needs to convince Thais that democracy is in their interests economically.” - Suranand Vejjajiva

“In 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. was 95% of the ‘influence pie’ in Thailand. China has since replaced the U.S. in that zero-sum place on the very same issues: infrastructure, employment, technology, and more.” - Judy Benn

“The reality is that for Thailand, the U.S. is one of the most, if not the top contender for their international outlook, while for the U.S., Thailand, while important, is overshadowed by their neighbors to the north and the U.S. allies in the Middle East.” - Judy Benn

### **Is the U.S.-Thailand Relationship in Decline?**

*Nearly all interviewees outside of government argued that the U.S.-Thai relationship has declined. There was wide variance as to when the decline began, however, from as far back as the mid-1970s, to the 1997 financial crisis, to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, to the *coups* of 2006 and 2014. Interviewees had widely varying views on the nature of the decline; whether it was comprehensive or concentrated largely in particular areas of cooperation and relations. There was also disagreement on the extent to which this perceived decline could be measured with empirical data, or whether it was largely subjective and based on impressions rather than facts.*

The question of a decline in U.S.-Thai relations is fundamentally a subjective judgment, for even seemingly impartial measures and metrics are subject to qualification. Moreover, the qualifiers themselves—history, political context, economic development, cultural changes—are independent factors in a relationship’s status.

Several key interviewees noted that the perception of decline was primarily a product of relative change compared to other bilateral relationships. China, India, ASEAN, and others have captured the imagination of Thais and feature prominently in Thai leaders’ vision for future positioning of Thailand in this dynamic region. Based on this account, U.S.-Thai relations are not necessarily in decline, but there are many other competing bilateral partners for Thailand, and the U.S. relationship has not kept up with the rapidly changing dynamics in the region.

Toward the end of the interviewing period, in May 2018, a noticeable number of interviewees stated that relations had indeed declined but were beginning to recover. This speaks to the series of visits to Thailand of U.S. Cabinet members, the Thai prime minister's visit to Washington, the up-scaling of Cobra Gold, and other overtures starting to accumulate.

One of the most striking arguments on the changing nature of U.S.-Thai relations comes from a recent survey of Thai military officers. In November 2017, two academics from the Australian National University, John Blaxland and Greg Raymond, produced a report, *Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China*. They interviewed over 1,800 Thai military officers and officials about great power relations. Perceptions of Thai leaders, particularly military officers, illustrate a clear shift in views on comparisons of the U.S. and China on key security concerns. Among its major findings were that:

- Military officers perceive that China's influence has already surpassed that of the U.S. in Thailand and Southeast Asia. According to the report, "Thai military officers feel that the current era is one of historic transition. China's influence, they believe, has caught up with and passed that of the United States."
- The U.S. is potentially a greater threat to Thailand than China, though a significant majority feels concerned about China's growing military power. The question on perceived threat should be qualified by noting that the research did not ask respondents to elaborate on whether the threat was a product of capability (reflecting a superior U.S. military deterrent in the region) or a product of shifting intentions of the U.S. towards Thailand. In the words of the report, "[D]espite this unease about China's growing military capabilities, and a view that the U.S. security guarantee is still important for Thailand, there is significant ambivalence to the United States. In fact, in the present period, our respondents saw the military threat from the United States as greater than any other Great Power, including China."

Since the turn of the century, there has been a decline in the number of Thai secondary, tertiary, and graduate/post-graduate level students studying in the United States. Even amid increasing alternative and competing opportunities in other nations, both Asian and Western, American schools, programs, scholarships, and fellowships have seen fewer Thai applicants and acceptances:

The Fulbright Program has long been a major source for U.S. support to Thai students studying at U.S. universities. In 2014, U.S. government funding for the Fulbright Program for Thai students and scholars was \$870,000. Taking into account inflation of U.S. university tuition, most Fulbright recipients now are required to pay for a significant gap between the fellowship support and the actual cost. The result is that many students who are selected are choosing to take fellowships in other countries, where they are offered more generous fellowships.

In contrast, there are 37,000 Chinese students studying in Thailand and 27,000 Thai students in China. Some 1,700 Chinese language teachers and volunteers work throughout Thailand.

### *Number of Thai Students Studying at U.S. Universities*

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of students</u>	<u>Change in percentage</u>
2000-01	11,187	
2001-02	11,606	3.7
2002-03	9,982	-14.0
2003-04	8,937	-10.5
2004-05	8,637	-3.4
2005-06	8,765	1.5
2006-07	8,886	1.4
2007-08	9,004	1.3
2008-09	8,736	-3.0
2009-10	8,531	-2.3
2010-11	8,236	-3.5
2011-12	7,626	-7.4
2012-13	7,314	-4.1
2013-14	7,341	0.4
2014-15	7,217	-1.7
2015-16	7,113	-1.4
2016-17	6,893	-3.1

In economic and trade relations, the U.S. remains a major player for Thai investment and trade. Future growth prospects are unclear, however. The U.S. position as an investor and trade partner has been slipping for more than a decade. In 2002, the U.S. and Thailand signed a bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), to address regulatory issues, standards, and policies relating to trade and investment between the two countries, including groundwork for negotiations toward a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). In 2004, TIFA discussions gave way to FTA negotiations, which foundered on several specific issues in 2006. Both TIFA and FTA talks were moribund until 2012, when the latter were briefly rekindled without advancement. TIFA discussions thus resumed in 2016, most recently in Washington in April 2018. Thailand is the second highest beneficiary globally of U.S. Generalized System of Preferences.

For decades, the U.S. was Thailand's largest trading partner, but this has been changing. As of May 2018, the U.S. was Thailand's largest export market at 11.4%, followed closely by China (11.1%) and Japan (9.6%). Indeed, for six of the previous seven years the U.S. has been either Thailand's second (behind China) or third largest (behind Japan) export market. The percentage gap between places one and three during that time has not been more than 3%. The U.S. held the top spot from 2008-2010. As of May 2018, the U.S. was Thailand's third largest source of imports at 6.2%, behind Japan (15.8%) and China (21.6%). Since at least 2008, the U.S. has occupied either the third, fourth, or fifth place, behind not only China and Japan, but the United Arab Emirates and/or Malaysia. Throughout the decade, the U.S. has represented between just over 5% and nearly 7% percent of Thailand's imports.

Defense cooperation remains strong, though many interviewees pointed to the negative impact of the suspension of International Military Education and Training (IMET) program at key moments after military *coups*. Under Section 508 of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1968, the U.S.

government is prohibited from providing aid to any military that participates in the overthrow of an elected leader in a *coup d'état*. While certain programs and assistance are subject to the discretion of U.S. officials, among the mandatory aid to be suspended is the IMET program, which provides U.S. government funds to members of foreign militaries to take classes at U.S. military facilities. According to the Foreign Assistance Act, IMET is designed to “encourage effective and mutually beneficial relations and increased understanding between the United States and foreign countries in furtherance of the goals of international peace and security” and “increase the awareness of nationals of foreign countries participating in such activities of basic issues involving internationally recognized human rights”. The Department of Defense describes its purpose as to “demonstrate the proper role of the military in a civilian-led democratic government”, “develop effective military justice systems”, and “foster an understanding of internationally recognized human rights”.

### **How the Shifting Geopolitical Context Affects U.S.-Thai Relations**

The U.S.-Thailand relationship has been greatly affected by recent and ongoing geopolitical changes, as seven of the underlying assumptions indicate. Thailand has diversified its range of bilateral partners, and today has more options than in the past. The U.S. still maintains a strong position in the region, but its advantage is eroding. The recently released Asia Power Index by the Australian think tank Lowy Institute, illustrates the perceived shift in power. While the U.S. maintains a dominant position in Asia on military capability and defense networks, in other key areas such as economic relationships, diplomatic influence, and perceived trajectory (future trends), China has a clear advantage, and the U.S. shares a competitive field with several other regional powers. In the research for this report, China was at least implicitly referenced in nearly every point and observation; overall it dominated discussion on a range of issues.

There is clear agreement that the geopolitical context is shifting, but uncertainty on the implications and trajectory of change. Interviewees from both Thailand and the U.S. expressed concerns about China’s rising influence, though there is a wide spectrum of views on how to respond.

*There is broad agreement that the U.S.-Thai alliance needs updating to stay relevant in a changing geopolitical context.* The challenge is to develop a *shared* geopolitical framework to form the basis of a renewed alliance. The 1954 Manila Pact and the 1962 Thanat-Rusk Communiqué that form the foundation of the bilateral relationship, were a product of a very different time. Forged in Cold War-era geopolitical competition, they articulate a clear set of shared strategic interests, mostly linked to the threat of communism. Thailand’s major non-NATO status (announced in 2002) was largely focused on addressing the global terrorist threat and the perceived “second front” in Southeast Asia. While counter-terrorism cooperation remains an important area of mutual interest, the framing of the 2002 decision is now somewhat outdated. Many of the discussions on shared strategic interests today focus on economic cooperation and non-traditional/asymmetric threats, such as cyber-security, pandemics, trafficking, narcotics. While these issues are indisputably important, they do not readily lend themselves to a clear framework of shared strategic interests.

*Despite this, many elements of the treaty alliance are alive and well.* The joint military exercises—particularly the annual large-scale and multi-national Cobra Gold drills—are a clear highlight of the relationship. On defense and intelligence, by all accounts the government-to-government cooperation is valued, extensive, and growing. Americans and Thais are equally proud and protective of Cobra Gold, which demonstrates its independent value as a political as well as military element to their relationship.

*Among Thai leaders, there is broad consensus that Thailand's priority should be to carefully balance major power, and avoid taking sides.* In fact, there is an enduring and well-documented culture within Thai diplomacy of geopolitical balancing, dating back to the colonial era, and the ability of King Chulalongkorn to maintain Thailand's independence through diplomacy. Thai leaders across the board embrace Thailand's role as a pragmatic and open country that can cooperate with everyone. Thailand has resisted coercive approaches and has sought to use soft, unobtrusive diplomacy to achieve better relations.

*Thai threat perceptions are largely focused on internal and non-traditional threats.* This view was corroborated by the Blaxland and Raymond study, which included data from surveys of Thai military officers. The threat from external state actors is generally seen as a low risk.

Among U.S. leaders, the prevailing sentiment was that *Thailand is an important ally, but that it is essential to find a new framework to articulate Thailand's strategic value to U.S. foreign policy in Asia.* Thailand's supporters in the U.S. government and foreign policy community are having difficulty making the case for prioritizing Thailand, given so many other competing interests. Arguments based on the traditional factors—the treaty alliance, geographic location, or history of relations—will not provide the momentum needed to advance the relationship beyond its current level.

*The U.S. has a clear interest in Thailand's return to political stability, which is closely related to U.S. interest in Thailand playing a more robust leadership role in the region.* This view is also clearly articulated in official policy. However, interviews of U.S. leaders indicated some frustration that Thailand has not been able to play a stronger regional leadership role due to internal focus and political instability.

## China

Interviews with U.S. leaders indicate a *widespread concern about China's growing influence in Southeast Asia, which has the potential to elevate Thailand's priority in U.S. foreign policy.* As Washington becomes more aware of deepening Chinese economic, political, and military connections, there is likely to be a corresponding rise in focus on this region, which will raise Thailand's profile. However, it is unclear whether the lack of an imminent and specific security threat in mainland Southeast Asia will continue to diminish the urgency and awareness of the region in Washington.

Arguably since 2006 and certainly since the 2011 elections, no nation has played a larger role in Thailand's political and economic foreign policy than China. This development has deepened considerably since 2014, and has extended to include—if to far less a degree—its military

relations. Thailand clearly sees diversifying its defense portfolio as consistent with its security interests. Since 2014, Thailand has agreed to purchase tanks and three submarines from China and has added joint air force exercises to existing army and naval drills. China has also become Thailand's largest trading partner and second largest (after Japan) source of direct foreign investment. This is bolstered by growing soft power that draws on deep historical and cultural ties—many Sino-Thais are proud of their heritage—and qualified only by a steep rise in Chinese tourists and attendant challenges.

Many Thai interviewees argued that Thailand's move towards China is a natural process. Thailand has deep historical roots in China, and has been close with China for most of the past 500 years. The arc of Thai-Chinese relations is moving the two countries towards closer relations that were the norm during earlier historical periods. Thailand also has a history of siding with the major power of the day (e.g., the U.S. during Cold War). This instinct to accommodate the dominant actor could further push Thailand towards a rising China, if the current trajectory holds.

Thailand's foreign policy will be profoundly shaped by the nature of cooperation (or rivalry) between the U.S. and China. For sake of discussion, there are two contrasting scenarios that could play out in the medium term (10 years), and perhaps persisting deeply into the late 21st century. The first is one of relatively balanced cooperation and competition between the U.S. and China for influence and partnership with Thailand, that allows for both global powers to advance their interests—alongside Thailand's—simultaneously. This is clearly Thailand's preference. The second is where zero-sum dynamics and growing rivalry with the U.S. leads China to function like a regional hegemon, causing Thailand to formulate policies and practices with Chinese interests and sensitivities in mind. This scenario would put extreme pressure on the U.S.-Thai relationship.

*Above all, Thai leaders argued that the U.S. should not force Thailand to choose between China and the U.S.* There are mixed views on the intentions and long-term interests of the U.S. and China in Thailand. Some Thai interviewees argued that the U.S. instincts to contain China are based on Cold War era thinking and ignore the multi-faceted role that China is playing in the region. Others are more dubious of China's rise, and see a creeping loss of sovereignty over time, with occasional references to neighboring countries. These people argue that the U.S. is needed to maintain balance, so as to ensure that no country becomes a regional hegemon.

According to several Thai interviewees, there is a perception amongst some segments of the Thai public and elite, that the U.S. is siding with former Thai political leaders in order to secure presumed benefits and access in Thailand. While interviewees generally regarded this as misinformation and conspiracy theory, they argued that not enough has been done to counter these misleading stories. Such accumulation of false news has had negative effects on U.S.-Thai relations.

There are significant concerns that China is creating a “web of dependency” through its long-term approach to economic integration, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The alarming increase in debt incurred by Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Laos is raising many concerns about potential erosion of sovereignty in the long run. According to interviewees, China's heavy-handed approach to the financing and construction of a high-speed rail in Thailand has challenged optimistic conventional wisdom on infrastructure and cast the BRI in a new light. Also on the regional level, references

to the Mekong River and ASEAN are common across Thailand's political divides, as are those to a Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar increasingly subject to Chinese influence and interests.

Several Thai interviewees compared the U.S. and China in terms of their respective geostrategic approach, and track records. China is widely seen as having a clear vision, long-term plans, and stable leadership that allows it to achieve its objectives. China's approach is also multi-sectoral, and arguably dominated by economic, political, and cultural ties. By contrast, U.S. policy swings with each administration, is short-term in approach, and is afflicted by policy contradictions stemming from competing interests in Washington. U.S. engagement in the region is largely dominated by security interests and military engagement. Furthermore, several interviewees expressed long-held concerns about U.S. reliability in a crisis.

China's influence in Thailand has been largely a factor of economics over the past quarter century. Thai firms have been eager to participate in China's rapid and continuing growth, and as such, the Thai government cannot afford to place such in jeopardy. While there is limited appetite for state intervention in the economy in Thailand, many Thai leaders are concerned about the growing attraction of China's model of developmental authoritarianism among Thai policy-makers.

Ideally, Thailand would like to enjoy the benefits of China's growth, engagement, and power *in balance with* those of the United States, thereby maximizing autonomy and options, flexibility and leverage. While maintaining a predominant security relationship with the U.S. against both traditional and non-traditional threats, Thailand is moving rapidly towards a diversified economy, including more trade and investment with not only the U.S. and China, but with Australia, Europe, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and others.

Thailand strongly prefers U.S.-China cooperation, and the growing rivalry at present is a source of major anxiety. Mindful of the history of great power relations, which might more readily suggest a "containment v. confrontation" model, Thais acknowledge that their own agency in this desired scenario is not unlimited. Indeed, Thailand certainly took note of President Trump's National Defense Strategy, which characterizes China as a "rival power" that seeks "to challenge American influence, values, and wealth" and as a "central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security". Yet a successful scenario for Thailand would mean not having to side with either power over the other in a crisis or conflict in which they are directly opposed.

### The Mekong River

Several Thai interviewees argued that the Mekong River will emerge as an issue of shared strategic interest for the U.S. and Thailand. However, at present, while Thai leaders are increasingly concerned about Chinese actions along the Mekong River, they are frustrated by U.S. leaders' lack of attention to the issue. It is clear that the U.S. and Thailand do not view the Mekong River from the same perspective or with the same level of importance. This is understandable. For a global power located a hemisphere away, it is one of tens if not hundreds of economically and ecologically significant rivers that both unite and divide neighboring countries across the world. For Thailand, one of six such countries through which the Mekong runs, its significance extends to national identity, security, even sovereignty.

For nearly two decades, a growing segment of Thailand's political, economic, and military leadership has complained about China's policies and practices on the river, including manipulation of its water levels via dams, dredging and blasting of its width and depth, and joint security patrols in Thai territory. Thailand views the Mekong largely in geopolitical terms, and secondarily in food security, economic and environmental terms.

The Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) has been the primary vehicle for U.S. engagement on Mekong issues. However, the Mekong sub-region has become a crowded space for regional powers seeking to provide support and exert influence. Thailand is also member to the China-led Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC, 2014), the Ayeyawady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS, since 2003), and the Greater Mekong Subregion (since 1992). The LMC was established by China, and the GMS includes it as a member.

Furthermore, despite the good intentions of the LMI, there is a sense that it is driven by U.S. domestic priorities, and is largely disconnected from geopolitical, economic, and security concerns of Thailand and other countries in the Mekong sub-region. The LMI's six pillars of focus are agriculture and food security, connectivity, education, energy security, environment and water, and health, along with cross-cutting issues such as women's empowerment and gender equality. It includes several projects that focus directly on the Mekong River, including the Sister-River Partnership, and directly supports the Mekong River Commission. With its Ministerial Meetings held on the margins of the ASEAN Regional Forum, the LMI and the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) coordinate on common goals and shared areas of engagement. Attention and resources for the LMI waned during President Obama's second administration and have decreased more noticeably under President Trump.

Several interviewees argued that the LMI has been over-shadowed by the LMC, which has significantly more resources available (primarily for infrastructure) and has a robust mechanism for water governance issues (which Thailand co-chairs). With the LMI in the shadow of the LMC, most Thai leaders argue that the U.S. is not serious about the Mekong.

## ASEAN

With U.S. backing and encouragement, Thailand was among the five founding members of ASEAN in 1967, and for decades had—and was seen as having—a leading voice in the organization both officially and informally. This remained the case even after a primary impetus for its founding, the regional communist threat, gave way to a focus on commerce, connectivity, and the resolution of political crises in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar. Beginning in late 2005, however, Thailand itself became the locus of such a crisis, resulting in the disruption and eventual cancellation of two major ASEAN gatherings in Thailand in 2008-09. The subsequent decade of continued instability in Thailand has precluded its regaining a leadership role or reputation.

After inconsistent engagement with ASEAN by the Bush administration, one of the few results of President Obama's "pivot" to Asia was renewed, if still limited, attendance and attention to ASEAN events and initiatives. The U.S. is a member of the security-focused ASEAN Regional Forum. The Trump administration's approach has been harder to assess thus far, save that it shares

in previous administrations' desire to see Thailand play a more prominent, even leading, role within the regional body.

In the past 10 years, there has been an upsurge in engagement with ASEAN by China. The controversy in the South China Sea in which half of ASEAN's ten-member states have separate territorial disputes with China has been a source of division within ASEAN. As such, ASEAN has struggled to find a single voice balancing solidarity with conciliation, as often succumbing to disparate messages of thinly-veiled support or stark opposition to China's claims—or in the case of Thailand, studied neutrality. Indeed, China has been clear and consistent in wanting to address the claims on a bilateral basis rather than through the regional body. The process for negotiating a code of conduct between ASEAN and China has been a long, drawn-out affair, with no end in sight. China is also a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum and is one of the “Plus Three” nations (alongside Japan and South Korea) with which it has met collectively since 1997. It is also ASEAN's largest trading partner collectively, and similarly for almost every individual member country.

In 2019, ASEAN's one-year Chair will rotate to Thailand for the first time in a decade, during which it will host two major leadership gatherings (ASEAN Regional Forum, and East Asia Summit). Thailand has an ideal opportunity to re-establish a leadership position in the region by taking full advantage of the ASEAN Chair. Furthermore, Thailand and the U.S. will be co-chairs on the maritime security working group under the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+) for the next three years, which will provide an opportunity for both nations to cooperate on promoting regional cooperation and strengthening Asian regional architecture.

### III. Outcomes from the Bilateral Dialogue

In July 2018, the Asia Foundation organized a track 1.5 bilateral dialogue in Washington, DC, bringing together two senior delegations from the U.S. and Thailand. Fourteen delegates from each country convened in separate and plenary sessions over three days, led respectively by former Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and former career U.S. Ambassador J. Stapleton Roy. Members of the Thai delegation had two days of initial and separate meetings with U.S. politicians and policy-makers, followed by the formal two-day dialogue, and concluding with a public panel discussion by Asia Foundation experts and select Thai delegates. The dialogue featured sessions on geopolitics, people-to-people relations, economics and trade, the private sector and the digital economy—all toward identifying a shared vision for a *recalibrated U.S.-Thailand relationship for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. The discussion was conducted under Chatham House rules, which allows for general outcomes to be shared but requires that specific points are not attributed to any individual.

Throughout the dialogue, the research team recorded key points and recommendations raised by delegates. It also followed up with many speakers and participants to seek clarification, as well as to assess levels of practicality and prioritization of the points raised. The result was an initial and expressly inclusive list of 44 recommendations, many aspirational and/or longer term in their realization.

#### **Inclusive List of Points and Recommendations**

##### *Maintaining geopolitical balance*

1. Shape the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) to be more complementary and mutually beneficial while taking into consideration ASEAN and Thai concerns. The FOIP is generally welcomed by Thai leaders, even though there remain concerns about how it is articulated. In particular, the strategy would be better received by Thailand (and other countries in ASEAN) if it reiterates the support to ASEAN's existing mechanisms rather than creating new ones, and addresses shared priorities of countries in the region. These would include connectivity, and other development and security issues. As the strategy remains work in progress, Thailand could further facilitate inputs into its formulation process, potentially in its role as ASEAN Chair.
2. Recognize the Mekong sub-region as a key strategic area. The U.S.-Thai relationship would benefit from greater U.S. engagement with countries in the Lower Mekong sub-region. In this connection, Thailand welcomes more robust U.S. engagement and collaboration on regional security, connectivity, and sustainable development, to name just a few issues. At present, U.S. engagement is far over-shadowed by other powers in the Indo-Pacific region. More robust engagement in the Lower Mekong sub-region would align with the FOIP strategy and demonstrate expanded commitment in this strategic region. Specific suggestions include:
  - Improving the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) to be geopolitically relevant. Currently, the LMI is too technical in focus, and is disconnected from Thailand's, as well as other regional countries', core economic and security interests. For the LMI to add strategic value to U.S. engagement with the region, it needs to be re-fashioned and better funded,

while considering the possibility to create linkages with compatible sub-regional cooperation frameworks, particularly the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS).

- Strengthen existing development cooperation programs and initiatives as a strategic way for the U.S. to have a greater presence in the Mekong sub-region. The new ACMECS Master Plan on Connectivity, for example, would be a viable platform for Thailand and the U.S. to explore possible collaboration in areas of common expertise while promoting a greater sense of ownership and local partnership of other countries in the LMI sub-region. Working through existing initiatives would also enhance U.S. participation and leadership on a multilateral basis, helping to support regional political balance, but also enabling U.S. expert input on key policy decisions.

3. Expand bilateral (and trilateral) engagement on non-traditional security:

- Public health and disease control – The U.S. and Thailand could expand cooperation in monitoring and controlling communicable diseases, as well as on development of vaccines and tropical medicine to benefit other countries in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly those in the Mekong sub-region. The two countries should explore the possibility of trilateral cooperation, for example, with Thailand’s neighbors, in building their capacities to prevent and suppress trans-boundary communicable disease threats. This could be done through training of their public health personnel, and by setting up or enhancing the capacities of disease control checkpoints, community clinics, or hospitals along border areas. Cooperation in this regard will also help promote U.S. goodwill, and hence a greater and sustainable footprint of the U.S. in the region.
- Border management/security – With connectivity being intensified, the U.S. and Thailand could share their expertise in border security management and standardizing border crossing procedures with countries in the region, particularly those in the Lower Mekong area.
- Cyber-security – The U.S. could help Thailand address this concern through capacity building cooperation similar to the approach currently used in Singapore and the Philippines. At the country level, the U.S. Embassy could facilitate a regular dialogue on cyber-security that brings together the private sector (U.S. and local), U.S. agencies, and host government agencies.

4. Recognize connectivity as a key area for future cooperation – Connectivity is a key area of interest—for economic, political, and security reasons—for Thailand and the mainland Southeast Asian region. Connectivity generally refers to economic integration of countries in the region, largely through infrastructure. However, connectivity can also include non-physical infrastructure, such as improved border management and digital technology. Improving connectivity can also entail addressing the downsides of an inter-connected region, such as control of cross-border criminal activity, and communicable diseases. The Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans recognize the importance of connectivity, and have actively shaped their engagement with Thailand and the region to meet this objective, including through the BRI. The U.S. could usefully engage in this area by offering higher quality options, and supporting under-resourced corridors and sectors, such as the East-West corridor across

mainland Southeast Asia. Closer U.S. cooperation with Japan, Korea, and Australia would also improve overall outcomes by demonstrating U.S. intent to work with like-minded allies in supporting Thailand and the Lower Mekong sub-region. The ACMECS Masterplan on Connectivity would be a useful blueprint for U.S. engagement consideration, as it would help the U.S. strengthen relations with Thailand and the CLMV countries through U.S. support of their development priorities.

5. Jointly explore collective security mechanisms. The Organization for European Security Cooperation (OESC) is a useful example of a multi-lateral collective security mechanism that is broader and more inclusive than NATO. There may be value in joint Thai and U.S. efforts to explore similar options in East and Southeast Asia. This could involve expansion of the ASEAN Regional Forum. The ASEAN-U.S. Dialogue could be a natural process for discussing options and developing a joint agenda.
6. Explore trilateral mechanisms involving the U.S., Thailand, and a third country, as a useful way of expanding engagement in the region and sending positive signals on U.S. intent to be collaborative and supportive of Thai leadership.

#### *Recalibrating military relations*

7. Strengthen joint capacity and mechanisms for humanitarian cooperation. The recent cave rescue highlights the positive potential for U.S.-Thai cooperation to create a permanent humanitarian response capability based in Thailand. The two sides should explore ways of jointly developing capacity and response mechanisms for Thailand and the region.
8. Rebalance the U.S.-Thai bilateral relationship. Currently, the U.S.-Thai relationship is dominated by defense and security cooperation. While these areas are a clear strength and should not be reduced or taken for granted, it should be a high U.S. priority to expand other non-security areas of cooperation in order to have more balance in the relationship. There would be a great deal of value in expanding cooperation in people-to-people engagement, including via cultural and educational exchanges, and in public health, justice, innovation, and development issues that address Thailand's key areas of interest.
9. Expand and promote Thai participation in U.S. military training courses as soon as possible. There are concerns about shifting perceptions within the Thai military. One of the best ways to ensure long-term friendship and cooperation between the U.S. and Thailand is to expand the number of Thai officers who are studying in U.S. military courses and academies.
10. Publicize, emphasize, and utilize the 2012 Joint Vision Statement between the Thai and U.S. militaries, and explore ways to update it during its annual review during Cobra Gold. The JVS helps to address concerns that the alliance needs updating and re-invigoration for the changing geopolitical context.
11. Consider expansion of ASEAN and other multi-lateral security cooperation/exercises. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy calls for strengthening alliances and multi-lateral approaches in the region. This could be translated into expansion of multi-lateral exercises

and security cooperation within ASEAN. Plans for U.S. and Thailand to co-chair the ADMM+ committee on Maritime Security are a positive step in this direction.

12. Increase interoperability. Thailand can facilitate expansion of interoperability with U.S. military doctrine and systems in the region, including with countries where the U.S. cannot do this directly. Cobra Gold already helps to expand interoperability with dozens of countries. Thailand can be a strategic partner for the U.S. to expand it further.

### *Making political progress*

13. Support Thailand as ASEAN Chair in 2019. The U.S. and Thailand have a strong interest in Thailand taking full advantage of 2019 to strengthen and reassert its leadership in the region. This presents a key and timely opportunity for the U.S. to support Thai leadership and help Thailand to strengthen ASEAN. It is also an important window of opportunity to strengthen ASEAN centrality at a key moment in changing geopolitical dynamics. Thailand's planned ASEAN Center for Sustainable Development Study and Dialogue (ACSDSD) and the ASEAN Center for Aging, would also be natural places for U.S. support, be it financial, technical, and/or political.
14. Enhance Thai engagement in Washington. Thailand's outreach and profile in U.S. policy circles could be enhanced through longer tours for Thai ambassadors. The Thai MFA should consider changes to allow senior diplomats to have 5+ year tours, similar to other regional embassies. MFA should also work with U.S. counterparts on learning more intricately how U.S. policy is formulated in Congress, including via the 12 Subcommittees of the U.S. Congress's Committee on Appropriations. Senior and mid-level embassy personnel should be encouraged to connect with American officials and knowledgeable citizens informally/socially, to foster long-term personal understanding and friendship.
15. Encourage support for the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA). Introduced by Senator Gardner (R-CO), ARIA intends to develop a "long-term strategic vision and a comprehensive, multifaceted, and principled United States policy for the Indo-Pacific region." ARIA is a very positive step, and sets an excellent tone for future U.S. engagement in the region.
16. Cultivate the next generation of Congressional leaders on Thailand and Southeast Asia. In the past, there were several prominent Senators and Congressional representatives with personal history and connections to Southeast Asia, who played a central role in strengthening engagement with Thailand and the region. Looking forward, it will be crucial to engage with key members of Congress who have the potential to play a similar role, including Senators Gardner, Markey, Kaine, Coons, Cardin, Rubio, and Sullivan, among others. The Thai Embassy and U.S. supporters of Thailand should actively engage with these members and their staffs to build understanding of Thailand, and encourage more frequent CODELs to Thailand.

### *Advancing U.S. foreign policy values*

17. Promote democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law with greater sensitivity, and understanding of the domestic dynamics of other countries. U.S. promotion of its values is generally accepted by Thai leaders across most of the political spectrum. But there is significant push-back across the board to perceptions of U.S. interference in Thai domestic politics. The youth study by ASAT also revealed that this view is shared by most young people as well. U.S. support and encouragement for Thailand's democratic transition and rule of law needs to be conducted in a way that does not lead to Thai concerns that the U.S. is stepping into its domestic politics. For example, U.S. efforts to mediate between political factions are largely unwelcome by Thai leaders. In addition, the U.S. should be cautious in how it responds to the planned election next year. Difficult messages should be delivered discreetly, to avoid unnecessary tension and loss of face.
18. Recognize that Thailand's return to elected government will be essential for many aspects of the U.S.-Thai relationship. While there is clear bipartisan support for strengthening the U.S.-Thai bilateral relationship, there are significant current constraints that will only be removed after an election is conducted and an elected government is established.

#### *Rethinking development cooperation*

19. Increase the strategic value of U.S. Official Development Assistance. The BRI and other regional development initiatives (by Korea, Japan, and others) are more responsive to Thai priorities, and give more added value to the bilateral relationships with those countries. The amount of funding matters much less compared to the style of engagement. U.S. approaches tend to be unilateral, with limited (if any) engagement with the Thai government, are often driven by U.S. domestic politics and bureaucratic systems and work almost exclusively with civil society and private contractors. If U.S. approaches worked through existing multi-lateral mechanisms, and were more aligned with Thai Government priorities, there would be far more strategic value for U.S. ODA. There are also opportunities for the U.S. to support Thailand on key challenges/priorities, including education reform, regional disparities, and the middle-income trap.
  - Education reform – Thailand's education system is a critical constraint on Thailand's long-term economic development, as Thai graduates are generally not well suited to meet the demands of a higher value-added economy. Knowledge and skill-sets are lacking, as is, more fundamentally, an educational model prioritizing and privileging critical thinking. Education problems in rural areas and poor urban neighborhoods also are exacerbating long-term inequalities. The U.S. could provide useful assistance in this area, in collaboration with the Thai Government and Thai institutions. While there is modest USAID assistance today through regional programming, there is a strong case for expanding this support and focusing on direct bilateral programming.
  - Middle income trap and economic competitiveness – There is broad consensus in Thailand that the economy is being out-paced by regional neighbors and is losing its competitive advantage. This trend, combined with the problem of a rapidly aging society, has created urgency in Thailand's economic reform and investment in higher productivity sectors. The U.S.—through private investment, ODA, and access to U.S. expertise—could help Thailand's efforts to address the key challenges over the coming

years. Thailand's highly "wired" society in social media, in terms of both volume and competence, provides a strong base for this development—and is one area in which Thailand outpaces its neighbors.

20. Support the ASEAN Center for Sustainable Development Study and Dialogue (ACSDSD) – This new center, likely to be established in 2019, would be a natural point of engagement for the U.S. and Thailand on development issues, and coincides with Thailand's chair of ASEAN the same year.

### *Investing in relationships*

21. Consider establishing a U.S.-Thailand Society (private non-profit organization) with a presence in Bangkok and Washington, to promote interest in and discussion of Thailand in the U.S., and the U.S. in Thailand, and U.S.-Thai relations. Such an organization would ideally play a consistent, proactive role in engaging Thais, Americans, and interested partners to deepen relations and work through misunderstandings when they arise.
22. Support regular engagement between U.S. and Thai political parties. As point of comparison, China uses party-to-party engagement to cultivate stronger relations between political leaders. If there are possibilities for arranging similar engagement between Thai and U.S. political parties, even on an occasional basis, this would help strengthen understanding and build closer and more consistent cooperation over time.
23. Invest more in educational exchanges and alumnae. As fewer Thais have been studying in the U.S., there is a strong argument for expanding their options and opportunities. The funding for Fulbright and other scholarship programs has been dramatically reduced, which is a long-term strategic mistake. Furthermore, compared to the past, there is very little continuing engagement between the U.S. Embassy (and U.S. institutions) and Thai alumnae of U.S. universities. Other countries do a much better job of maintaining these personal relations, via social-educational (e.g. speaker nights preceded and followed by drinks/refreshments) series and events. The dramatic cuts to the State Department's budget for Educational and Cultural Affairs should be reviewed/reversed. Short-term educational exchanges of less than a semester, possibly in partnership with private sector to lower costs, should also be developed. Many of the people-to-people benefits of conventional programs can still be accrued via shorter stays.
24. Maintain social and consultative relations between Thai and U.S. leaders even after they (both) step down from public office. Representing a mid-size country, as opposed to one with an expansive pool of leaders and experts, Thailand's leaders, experts, officials, and officers generally remain well-informed and well-connected within Thai policy circles after their retirement. The U.S. Embassy, and U.S. associated institutions, should maintain relations with key people, both toward enhancing their understanding of issues and concerns and cultivating continuity in relationships.
25. Promote the Peace Corps. In coordination with Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other agencies and the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, the Peace Corps should increase its public

profile as having sponsored the service of more than 5,400 Americans in Thailand—an inaugural country program—since its founding in 1961. The Peace Corps is mentioned frequently as an example of effective and successful U.S. people-to-people contact. It has not only fostered long-term relations but provided both Americans and Thais with expanded knowledge, understanding and knowledge of one another. Noticeably, a significant part of the contact has been at the “grassroots” level, providing invaluable understanding of the Thai people.

26. Consider creating a U.S.-Thailand Higher Education Initiative, funded by U.S. and Thai colleges and universities, the private sector, and think tanks. Objectives might include encouraging Thais to study in the U.S., encouraging Americans to study in Thailand, and building formal relationships using social media and video links between U.S. and Thai higher education institutions. This could be expanded beyond Thailand to include other Southeast Asian students and universities (and sources of funding).
27. Address informational barriers to Thai students wishing to study in the U.S., and vice versa. The U.S. should dispel myths about difficulties of studying in the U.S., possibly by holding information sessions in Bangkok, hosted and conducted by the U.S. Embassy, to explain to self-selecting Thai students the process of applying to study in U.S. high schools, colleges, and universities. This would help in dispelling commonly held misunderstandings regarding the bureaucratic burdens, biases, and restrictions attendant to studying in the U.S. These sessions could be held several times per year, ideally in Thailand’s South, North, Northeast and other rural and urban areas outside Bangkok. Furthermore, the Thai government could increase the number of U.S. students studying in Thailand by making information on visas and programs more easily accessible and higher-profile.
28. Re-invigorate the study of Southeast Asia in the United States. American scholars and former officials, the Thai government, and the private sector should find creative solutions and encourage expanded funding toward renewing Southeast Asia area studies and language programs. The U.S. Government should continue its support of Southeast Asia studies and languages, building on the recently announced funding of six universities as National Resource Centers. This might include money from the private sector, in exchange for students working for particular companies for a specified and limited period of time thereafter. Where necessary and possible, take such program online and work collaboratively to maximize resources.
29. Re-invigorate the study of the U.S. in Thailand. For example, the Thai Government and Thai actors could support the American Studies Association of Thailand and other research efforts to improve understanding of current U.S. policy and political dynamics. In particular, there is a clear need to support the next generation of Thai researchers, and organize discussions by visiting U.S. scholars/dignitaries with university audiences.
30. Organize further Track 1.5 dialogues on a sector-by-sector basis—geopolitics, the private sector, people-to-people relations, etc—toward delving more deeply into issues, and resulting in more concrete, focused, and actionable outcomes/recommendations. This could be done by The Asia Foundation and/or other organizations, in cooperation with both governments.

31. Reach out to American citizens. Thailand has many clear strengths that appeal to Americans, including cuisine, Buddhism, architecture, and shared history. Furthermore, many of today's scholars and experts on the country are "accidental Southeast Asianists", often falling in love with the country during tourist visits. It may be useful to think about creative ways to build Thailand's profile among the mainstream U.S. population, and to cultivate closer links with those who have developed a nascent fondness for the Kingdom through outreach programs.

#### *Leveraging digital technology*

32. Expand cooperation on digital technology. Thailand and the United States should actively expand policy engagement on digital technology, cybersecurity, social media, and promotion of innovation. U.S. businesses, especially in digital technology industries broadly defined, should get involved in the Thai government's *Thailand 4.0* initiative, tapping into one of the most social media-connected populations in the world. Thais have thoroughly integrated social media and digital technology into their lives, and the market for intelligent online platforms is growing rapidly. For example, there are more Facebook users in Bangkok than in any other city in the world, and 52 million people (76% of the national population) use the platform. Combining this advantageous context with U.S. expertise is a natural area for Thai-U.S. cooperation. The Thai Government should expand engagement with American technology companies to help create a conducive ecosystem for the incubation and growth of Thai start-ups. Furthermore, the Thai Government should make it easier for high-skilled technology professionals ("digital nomads") to obtain longer-term visas, to enable them to spend more time focused on Thai companies and government clients.

33. Utilize social media to enhance two-way U.S. Embassy-to-people conversation, toward making U.S. culture, events, elections, etc. more accessible to Thai social media users.

34. Help Thai start-ups create a conducive "ecosystem" for incubation and growth. The U.S. government has been very effective at creating such an ecosystem domestically, which has paid enormous dividends for the economy and for innovation. This may be a useful area for future U.S.-Thai cooperation. While Thailand is doing very well on digital infrastructure, there are key areas that are very under-developed and under-performing on their potential, such as access to venture capital. There are significantly lower levels of venture capital funding Thai start-ups compared to those in Indonesia, Vietnam and Singapore. This problem is constraining entrepreneurship and limiting the potential for rapid growth of local enterprises. At present, Thai venture capital investors are very conservative, and require a much faster path to profitability compared to U.S. and other Asian investors.

35. Collaborate on key regulatory issues in the digital space, including privacy, free flow of data, and taxation. The U.S. Department of Commerce's new Digital Attaché program could be helpful in sharing advice, best practices, key performance indicators, and lessons learned. Furthermore, collaboration in these areas could involve government and private sector partnerships, with U.S. technology companies providing advice and policy engagement.

36. Ensure the free flow of data. This will be essential for maximizing the potential for a digital transformation and economic growth. Thailand and the U.S. could work together to find

solutions that maintain the free flow of data without compromising privacy or cyber-security—which is a global challenge requiring collaboration. Both countries should discourage data sovereignty policies by other ASEAN countries that will put their integrated economies at a major disadvantage. Free flow of data also matters for traditional business sectors. With the increased use of blockchain and artificial intelligence, free flow of data will be even more important in the future.

37. Strengthen talent and skills. This is a clear area for public-private collaboration, as several technology companies are already cultivating emerging talents and providing technology training to key populations. This complements points above on educational challenges and initiatives.
38. Cultivate online platforms and digitally enabled SMEs. Evidence exists that digitally enabled SMEs are growing twice as fast as more traditional SMEs. Online platforms can help SMEs develop digital capacity much faster. Thailand is a world leader on “social commerce” and social media sites are evolving to provide these platforms, but much more could be done to help local SMEs access these platforms. This is a natural area for collaboration, as Thai SMEs are struggling in skills/knowledge of online platforms and on how to develop their business to take advantage of such platforms.
39. Address the risks and downsides of the digital economy. Technology companies are initiating significant new programs to help reduce potential risks to people who are new to the digital world, including how to protect their information, manage disinformation and hate speech, and understand digital citizenship (principles for behavior online). This is also a natural area of collaboration between Thailand and the U.S., as Thailand has millions of new digital users, and there is a strong shared interest in protecting users and reducing malicious practices.

#### *Facilitating closer economic relations*

40. Build on Thailand’s potential advantages in the high value-added agricultural sector. Thailand should consider utilizing its natural advantages and long history of agricultural development and employment, toward tapping into a growing and lucrative U.S. market in “craft” foods. Thailand has long been the leading rice exporter in the world, while its land and expertise make it a natural fit to adapting certain sectors in the direction of high-end U.S. food markets. This will require Thailand to secure stronger sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures, but it could be a huge advantage for future growth. There may also be opportunities for commercial collaboration between U.S. and Thai enterprises to enhance exports to third countries (such as Japan).
41. Consider resurrecting FTA talks. The U.S. and Thailand should give this serious thought, especially because reopening negotiations would be legally and technically simple. The current U.S. administration’s emphasis on bilateral mechanisms and attention to the U.S. trade deficit with Thailand, also provide a conducive pretext for re-starting talks.
42. Use intellectual property to economic advantage. The key is to ensure that Thailand retains value-added elements in the country even as it takes Thai brands abroad. There are several

examples of Thai companies that have gone global but given up rights to foreign partners (e.g., Red Bull). These cases should be studied to avoid a repeat, as the value added/lost is considerable.

43. Review customs policy in Thailand. Customs policy remains a major challenge for SME growth in Thailand, as many SMEs can now engage in international trade but are constrained by problems with customs. Some U.S. companies are also constrained in their exports, while others harbor a perception of unfairness that affects their business regardless of the reality. Thus, any review should be well publicized and explained.
44. Resolve open trade disputes to reduce risk to Thailand's GSP privilege status. This is due to two current reviews, including one on access of U.S. pork exports, and another on labor rights. Given the current U.S. administration's policy on reducing trade deficits, the review process for areas of dispute is likely to be much faster than in the past.

## IV. Strategic Recommendations

Based on outcomes from the interviews and the bilateral dialogue, the project team has identified ten key priority areas for strengthening relations between the United States and Thailand. These points consistently rose to the top in interviews and discussions, as the most urgent areas for attention, and the most promising opportunities for cooperation. They are intended for the Thai and U.S. Governments, as well as for leaders from the private sector, policy think tanks, foundations, and the media. While these recommendations do not necessarily represent a consensus position, they reflect the predominant view of the relevant leaders, experts, and officials who participated in interviews and the bilateral dialogue.

1. The United States should work with Thailand to shape the **Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP)** to be complementary and mutually beneficial by taking into consideration ASEAN and Thai concerns. The FOIP is generally welcomed by Thai leaders, but concerns remain about how it is articulated. The strategy would be better received by Thailand (and other countries in ASEAN) if it more clearly supported ASEAN centrality in Southeast Asia; strengthened ASEAN's existing mechanisms, instead of creating new mechanisms; and supported shared priorities of countries in the region, including connectivity and sustainable development, in addition to security concerns.

Recognizing that the strategy is still in development and will require periodic review and revision, Thailand should further facilitate and advance its inputs as the FOIP evolves, both individually and in its role as ASEAN Chair in 2019.

2. The United States should regard the **Mekong River and sub-region** as a key area of shared strategic interest with Thailand. The Mekong River will likely be a critical area for future cooperation, not only on development and economic integration, but also on security and geopolitical issues. The U.S. should expand its engagement on traditional and human security concerns in the Mekong sub-region and expand its assistance beyond the narrow confines of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI). The construction of dams, blasting and dredging of river beds, and joint security patrols, have raised concerns in Thailand and other nations of the Mekong sub-region for their physical and economic security and sustainability. Concerns over river level management, and its impact on irrigation, navigation, security, and the environment, will have a profound effect on Thailand's livelihoods and regional relations. Based on interviews and the bilateral dialogue discussions, Thailand generally welcomes increased U.S. presence and engagement on the Mekong as a counter-balance to undue influence by any single power, and toward ensuring that their riparian rights are protected.

Thailand should work with the United States to find meaningful entry points for U.S. engagement. Where appropriate, Thailand should invite the U.S. to participate in or observe relevant meetings and fora concerning the Mekong sub-region. Thailand could otherwise host focused bilateral meetings with the U.S. in the run-up to such events to develop clear shared positions. Thailand is also in an ideal position to help the U.S. expand cooperation through existing platforms, such as ASEAN, ACMECS, and the LMI.

3. The United States should adapt **U.S. Official Development Assistance (ODA)** to be more strategically relevant, and more aligned with the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy. If U.S. approaches worked through existing multi-lateral mechanisms, and were more aligned with Thai (and shared sub-regional) priorities, there would be far more strategic value from U.S. ODA. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other regional development initiatives (for example, Korean, Japanese, Australian, ADB, and Indian initiatives) are much more responsive to Thai priorities, and give more added value to its bilateral relationships with those countries. Furthermore, the amount of funding is not as important as the style of engagement. U.S. approaches tend to be unilateral, with limited engagement with the Thai government. U.S.-funded programs are often driven solely by U.S. domestic priorities and internal bureaucratic processes, and work almost exclusively with civil society and private contractors. The U.S. could contribute to connectivity in the region through non-physical infrastructure issues, such as digital technology, cross-border trade, transnational crime, and re-emerging communicable diseases. The U.S. should review and re-orient the LMI to more directly address regional connectivity, with attendant increases in funding and political attention. Linkages between the LMI and the ACMECS Master Plan on Connectivity should be explored, as ACMECS is led by Thailand and its neighbors, and includes areas in which U.S. expertise would be welcome and useful.

Thailand should be more proactive in seeking U.S. engagement and support via the LMI and the ACMECS process. Utilizing its decades of familiarity with U.S. Official Development Assistance and security infrastructure, Thailand should help the U.S. find specific and concrete ways in which it might increase regional connectivity, including through non-infrastructure programs that more clearly appeal to U.S. priorities such as digital technology, cybersecurity, and energy.

4. Shortly after elections are held in 2019, Thailand should proactively expand engagement with the **U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET)** program. A top beneficiary of IMET since its inception in 1976, Thailand has seen its participation drop since (and on account of) recent *coups d'état*. Specifically, Thailand should eliminate any barriers to promotion within its military for IMET participants, and indeed favorably consider such graduates when evaluating them for advancement. Thailand should also increase its own funding toward IMET participation—which is not contingent upon its form of government—and thus send larger numbers to study in U.S. military institutions.

Following elections in Thailand, the United States should resume making IMET funds available to Thai students, and expand and promote their participation in the program. Shifting perceptions within the Thai military regarding U.S. intentions in the region, and ongoing U.S. concerns relating to the continuance of *coups d'état* in Thailand, would both be addressed via education and training focused on law, professionalism, and interoperability.

5. The United States should prioritize support for Thailand during its role as **ASEAN Chair in 2019**. Both nations have a strong interest in Thailand taking full advantage of 2019 to reassert and strengthen its traditional leadership in the region. This is a timely opportunity for both nations to enhance U.S. engagement with ASEAN and re-affirm ASEAN's centrality in Southeast Asia at a moment of changing geopolitical dynamics. The U.S. should also support

Thailand by fully engaging ASEAN mechanisms and by fully participating in ASEAN fora and events. Thailand's planned ASEAN Center for Sustainable Development Study and Dialogue (ACSDSD) could also be a useful focal point for development-related technical support.

6. Thailand should aim to broaden and deepen its **engagement in Washington**. Thailand's outreach and profile in U.S. policy circles could be enhanced through longer tours for Thai ambassadors and other diplomats. Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs should consider changes to allow senior diplomats to serve for at least five years in Washington, and expand opportunities for Thai diplomats to learn about the U.S. and American society and politics. The Ministry should also work with U.S. counterparts to better understand how U.S. policy is formulated in Congress, including via relevant subcommittees and the Committees on Appropriations. Senior and mid-level embassy personnel should be encouraged to connect with American officials and knowledgeable citizens informally, to foster long-term relationships.
7. The United States should **promote democratic principles and the rule of law** with clarity and purpose, but also **with recognition of and sensitivity to local context**. Promoting U.S. values does not need to be at the expense of the bilateral relationship. Although Thai leaders across the political spectrum generally accept that the U.S. is politically inclined—and in some cases legally compelled—to promote its values in engaging foreign nations, there is broad resistance to a “one size fits all” approach that belies the length, breadth, and depth of U.S.-Thailand relations. Thais of all demographic, economic, and educational brackets generally perceive the promotion of U.S. values as interference in—rather than response to—their domestic politics. As a result, perceptions of U.S. intentions and reliability as an ally have declined. The U.S. should also ensure that their promotion is calibrated to the culture it is encountering. It should choose carefully how, when, where, and by whom it conveys its messages in the run-up and response to political events in Thailand, including but not limited to the anticipated elections in 2019.
8. Thailand and the United States should actively expand policy engagement on **digital technology, cybersecurity, social media, and promotion of innovation**. Thais have thoroughly integrated social media and digital technology into their lives, and the market for intelligent online platforms is growing rapidly. For example, there are more Facebook users in Bangkok than in any other city in the world, and 52 million people (76% of the national population) use the platform. Combining this advantageous context with U.S. expertise is a natural area for Thai-U.S. cooperation. The Thai Government should expand engagement with American technology companies to help create a conducive ecosystem for the incubation and growth of Thai start-ups. Thailand should welcome assistance in accessing venture capital (significantly lower levels fund Thai start-ups compared to those in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore) and in developing regulations in the digital space, including on privacy and taxation. The U.S. Department of Commerce's new Digital Attaché program could be helpful in sharing advice, best practices, key performance indicators, and lessons learned.
9. Thailand and the United States should **quickly resolve lingering trade issues** and consider reopening **FTA negotiations**. With significant disruptions in global trade beginning to affect

regional economies, the stakes are higher now for both countries to reset the trade relationship. The U.S. position as a trade partner of Thailand has been slipping for more than a decade. In both countries, reopening negotiations would be legally and technically simple. The current U.S. administration's emphasis on bilateral mechanisms and attention to the U.S. trade deficit with Thailand further justifies the effort. There are also risks from not resolving current trade issues. Thailand is the second highest beneficiary globally of U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which could be affected by current reviews under way on U.S. pork exports and labor rights. In 2002, the U.S. and Thailand signed a bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) to address regulatory issues, standards, and policies relating to trade and investment between the two countries, including groundwork for negotiations toward a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA). In 2004, TIFA discussions gave way to FTA negotiations, which foundered on several specific issues in 2006. TIFA discussions resumed in 2016, most recently in Washington in April 2018.

10. Thailand and the United States should re-invigorate the **study of each other's nation domestically**. In conjunction with interested and qualified Thai academics and donors, the Thai government, foundations, and private sector should increase support for research and programs on the United States and U.S.-Thai relations. They should also support the re-establishment of American Studies programs at Thai universities (in Bangkok and throughout the country), and facilitate public visits of influential Americans from all sectors—scientists, entertainers, entrepreneurs, public intellectuals, and others. This is necessary to improve all Thais' understanding of current and changing U.S. policy and political dynamics, as well as, more broadly, a large, diverse, and complex democracy. It is also necessary to prepare the next generation of Thai scholars interested in examining American politics and policy, society and culture, economic and military affairs, history and future innovation.

In conjunction with the Thai government, U.S. scholars, former officials, and the private sector should encourage the renewal of Southeast Asia area studies and language programs in American universities. The dramatic reduction in scholarship on Thailand and Southeast Asia is widely recognized as a major cause of the decline in American understanding of Thailand. Likewise in Washington, there is notable dearth of appreciation among U.S. politicians, policy-makers, and policy intellectuals for Thailand—and other Southeast Asian countries—as a dynamic polity with an evolving view on the U.S. role in the region. The U.S. should also seek new and creative means of securing the necessary funding for these programs, potentially via investment from the private sector.

Complementing and contributing to these initiatives, both nations should seek to reverse the steady decline in the numbers of their students studying in the other's secondary schools and universities. The U.S. Embassy should expand efforts to address informational barriers to Thai students wishing to study in the U.S., and to address misunderstandings regarding the bureaucratic burdens, biases, and restrictions attendant to studying in the U.S. Similarly, the Thai Government should make information on visas and programs more easily accessible and higher-profile to potential American students.

## V. Conclusions and Next Steps

There is renewed interest in the United States and Thailand to create a deeper, stronger, and *recalibrated bilateral relationship for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. The bilateral dialogue in Washington provided clear evidence that the relationship has strong supporters on both sides, and that the changing geopolitical context provides an unexpected opportunity to reset the relationship in a positive direction. While participants are concerned about the general decline in knowledge and familiarity with each other's countries, both the Thai and American participants believe that promoting greater understanding will allow both nations to strengthen their relationship and address the political, economic, and security challenges in the decades ahead.

This report provides specific recommendations on how this can be achieved, and on which areas should be the highest priority. The outcomes of the dialogue (chapter III) provide a comprehensive list of areas for attention and reflect the full spectrum of issues raised in the dialogue. The list of strategic recommendations (chapter IV) focuses on the issues that are widely considered high priority for short to medium-term action.

The dialogue concluded with strong statements by both delegations' chairs urging the Asia Foundation (and other organizations) to facilitate follow-up conversations with relevant officials, corporations, and political leaders on both sides. To this end, the Foundation intends to organize several follow-up conversations and briefings in Bangkok involving members of the Thai delegation. There have also been consistent calls for more regular track 1.5 or track 2 platforms for bilateral dialogue, similar to the series of meetings in the 1980s organized by Professor Robert Scalapino and Professor Wiwat Mungkandi. The Foundation intends to explore future programming to build on the success of this initiative, most likely including a follow-up dialogue in Bangkok in 2019 or 2020.

## Annex – Dialogue Agenda

### Dialogue to Strengthen the Relationship between Thailand and the United States

July 17-19, 2018, Washington, DC

#### Tuesday, July 17

6:30 – 8:30 PM	<p><b>Welcome Dinner</b></p> <p>Opening Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. David Arnold, President and CEO, The Asia Foundation</li> <li>• H.E. Chuan Leekpai, Former Prime Minister of Thailand</li> <li>• Ambassador Stapleton Roy, Former Assistant Secretary of State, Former Founding Director and Distinguished Scholar, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars</li> </ul>
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#### Wednesday, July 18

8:00 – 9:00 AM	<p>Welcome and introduction of Senator Cory Gardner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambassador Stapleton Roy, Former Founding Director and Distinguished Scholar, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars</li> </ul> <p><b>The Enduring U.S. Commitment to Thailand and Asian Allies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO), Chairman, Subcommittee on East-Asia, The Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations</li> </ul>
9:00 – 9:30 AM	<p>Introductions and overview of program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. John Brandon, Senior Director for International Relations Programs, The Asia Foundation</li> </ul> <p>Presentation of Asia Foundation Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Thomas Parks, Thailand Country Representative, The Asia Foundation</li> <li>• Mr. Benjamin Zawacki, Researcher, U.S.-Thai Bilateral Relations Program</li> </ul>
9:30 – 11:00 AM	<p><b>Shifting Geopolitical Trends and Implications for Thailand and Southeast Asia</b></p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Wiwat Mungkandi, Former Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister, Former Vice President of Chulalongkorn University, Former Senator</p> <p>Lead-off speakers:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambassador Stapleton Roy, Former Founding Director and Distinguished Scholar, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars</li> <li>• Ms. Arjaree Sriratanaban, Deputy Director-General, Department of East Asian Affairs, Thailand Ministry of Foreign Affairs</li> </ul> <p>Discussants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Kavi Chongkittavorn, Senior Fellow, Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University</li> <li>• Mr. Frank Jannuzi, President and CEO, The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation</li> </ul> <p>Roundtable Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the geopolitical landscape in the region evolving? What are the implications for Thailand-U.S. relations?</li> <li>• What are shared strategic interests of Thailand and the U.S. pertaining to the current and evolving geopolitical landscape?</li> <li>• What do you see as opportunities and challenges in translating these shared strategic interests into tangible outcomes?</li> </ul> <p><i>For the U.S. side</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the Southeast Asia region important to the U.S.? How does Thailand fit in this strategic importance?</li> <li>• What are the differences and commonalities between U.S. administrations on the perceived importance of Southeast Asia, the value of Thailand, and expectations of Thailand?</li> <li>• What would drive (or is driving) increased U.S. engagement with Southeast Asia?</li> <li>• What are the implications of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy for Thailand?</li> </ul> <p><i>For the Thai side</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is Thailand significant for Southeast Asia geopolitically, economically, socially?</li> <li>• What roles has Thailand taken to contribute to peace, security, stability and prosperity of the region?</li> <li>• What is the added value of Thailand-U.S. cooperation in Southeast Asia? In what ways has such cooperation benefitted the region?</li> <li>• How does Thailand plan to make the most of its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2019? How could Thailand-U.S. cooperation contribute to realizing these priorities?</li> </ul>
<p>11:30 AM – 12:45 PM</p>	<p><b>Current State and Future of the Bilateral Relationship</b></p> <p>Moderator: Mr. John Brandon, Senior Director for International Relations Programs, The Asia Foundation</p> <p>Perspectives from current and former officials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambassador Virachai Plasai, Ambassador of Thailand to the United States</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambassador Ralph “Skip” Boyce, Former U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, President of Boeing Southeast Asia</li> </ul> <p>Perspectives from political/congressional leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Kiat Sittheeamorn, Former President of Thailand Trade Representative (Cabinet rank)</li> <li>• Mr. Michael Schiffer, Professional Staff Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations</li> </ul> <p>Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is Thailand significant to the U.S. (and vice versa), in both bilateral and regional contexts?</li> <li>• How do you see the current state of Thailand-U.S. relationship, particularly in terms of the development of their bilateral relations over time?</li> <li>• What would be an ideal path for Thailand-U.S. relations in the future?</li> <li>• On Thailand-U.S. engagement, what areas of cooperation do you think are still lacking/ inadequate or need improvement? How can we make them better? What is needed to achieve this end?</li> <li>• What are the limitations or challenges in strengthening Thailand-U.S. relations?</li> </ul>
2:00 – 3:00 PM	<p><b>Current State and Future of the Bilateral Relationship (<i>continued</i>)</b></p> <p>Moderator: Mr. John Brandon, Senior Director for International Relations Programs, The Asia Foundation</p> <p>Perspectives from scholars and experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor Catharin Dalpino, Professor Emeritus, Georgetown University and Adjunct Professor, Seton Hall University</li> <li>• Mr. Kavi Chongkittavorn, Senior Fellow, Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University</li> </ul> <p>Discussants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Phongthep Thepkanjana, former Deputy Prime Minister</li> <li>• Dr. Ann Marie Murphy, Associate Professor and Director, Center for Emerging Powers and Transnational Trends, School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University</li> </ul>
3:00 – 3:45 PM	<p>Small group discussions – Development of practical recommendations</p> <p><b><i>Small groups Day 1</i></b> – delegates will move to location for small group discussions (location information will be provided by organizers). Rapporteur in each group will capture each recommendation as discussed. Draft text of recommendations will immediately be posted on closed access platform for the event, and available for delegates and organizers to access/review.</p> <p>Group 1: Senior leaders - will participate in a combination of one-on-one interviews, and small group meetings to discuss practical recommendations.</p>

	<p>Group 2: Current officials</p> <p>Group 3: Private sector and academic leaders</p>
4:00 – 5:30 PM	<p><b>Defense and Non-traditional Security Cooperation</b></p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Anucha Chintakanond, Advisory Strategic Committee on National Security, Deputy Prime Minister’s Office, Principal Adviser to Government &amp; Parliament</p> <p>Lead-off speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Joseph Felter, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, U.S. Department of Defense</li> <li>• Gen. Thawip Netniyom (ret.), former Secretary-General, National Security Council, currently Advisor to Deputy Prime Minister’s Office</li> </ul> <p>Discussants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Brian Harding, Deputy Director and Fellow, Southeast Asia Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies</li> <li>• Mr. Witchu Vejjajiva, Deputy Director-General, Department of Americas and South Pacific Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</li> </ul> <p>Roundtable Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you assess the current state of Thailand-U.S. security and defense cooperation?</li> <li>• How does defense and security cooperation benefit both Thailand and the U.S.? What more should we expect from each other?</li> <li>• What are the priority areas for security cooperation that need to be strengthened? What more is needed to progress these areas of cooperation? What are the challenges?</li> <li>• How can we strengthen cooperation on non-traditional security threats, particularly cyber-security and disinformation?</li> </ul>

**Thursday, July 19**

8:30 – 8:45 AM	<p>Opening Session: Review of Day 1, Plans for Day 2</p> <p>Mr. Thomas Parks, Thailand Country Representative, The Asia Foundation</p>
8:45 – 10:15 AM	<p><b>People-to-People Relations</b></p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Keith Luse, Executive Director, The National Committee on North Korea</p> <p>Lead-off speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Phongthep Thepkanjana, former Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand</li> <li>• Mr. James Stent, Senior Counselor, Vriens &amp; Partners, Bangkok</li> </ul>

	<p>Discussants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Ora-orn Poocharoen, Chiang Mai University, School of Public Policy</li> <li>• Dr. Alice Ba, Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Delaware</li> </ul> <p>Roundtable Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the most important areas of shared values, and what role they should play in the future of the bilateral relationship?</li> <li>• How important is soft power for the future of the U.S.-Thai relations? How does Chinese soft power compare to U.S. soft power historically and today?</li> <li>• How can we better utilize trends in digital technology and media to enhance people-to-people linkages?</li> <li>• What scope for future parliamentary/legislative relations? How does cooperation in this area benefit Thailand and the U.S.?</li> <li>• Which areas of relationship/ cooperation are still lacking or inadequate? Towards which end do you want to see them develop?</li> <li>• How to further strengthen key areas: Academic linkages, connections between political leaders, business linkages, awareness of the history of the bilateral relationship, young people</li> </ul>
<p>10:45 AM – 12:15 PM</p>	<p><b>Economic and Trade Relations</b></p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Karl Jackson, Professor of Southeast Asia Studies, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies</p> <p>Lead-off speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Edmund Sim, Partner, Appleton Luff International Lawyers</li> <li>• Dr. Krisda Piampongsant, Board of Trade of Thailand, Chairman, Committee on International Trade Negotiations</li> </ul> <p>Discussants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Somyod Tangmeelarp, Chairman, International Trade Cooperation, Federation of Thai Industries</li> <li>• Mr. Alexander Feldman, President and CEO, U.S.-ASEAN Business Council</li> </ul> <p>Roundtable Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will the current trade-related tensions between the U.S. and China affect Thailand?</li> <li>• How is Thailand economically significant to the U.S. (and vice versa)? What is the trajectory for future economic linkages and cooperation?</li> <li>• What specific trade/economic areas of cooperation are most critical to improve? What are the key challenges, and how can they be addressed?</li> <li>• In what way should Thailand and the U.S. work together more in order to improve their cooperation in key priority area?</li> </ul>

12:15 – 1:30 PM	Lunch: Remarks by Mr. <b>Gilbert B. Kaplan</b> , Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration
1:30 – 3:30 PM	<p><b>Digital Transformation and Enabling Innovation</b></p> <p>Moderator: Mr. John Goyer, Senior Director, Southeast Asia, U.S. Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Lead-off speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Astri Kimball, Senior Policy Counsel, Google</li> <li>• Mr. Probir Mehta, Head of Global Trade &amp; Intellectual Property, Washington, DC, Facebook</li> <li>• Mr. Michael Bäk, Head of Public Policy, Thailand, Facebook</li> <li>• Mr. James Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Services, U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration</li> <li>• Mr. Archawat Chareonsilp, Chief Strategy Officer, HUBBA</li> </ul> <p>Roundtable Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to support the ecosystem for innovation and digital technology-driven growth?</li> <li>• What are major developments in these areas? How significant are they to contemporary economies?</li> <li>• What are the upsides and the downsides of rapid development in the digital economy and social media? What opportunities are there for Thailand-U.S. cooperation, to maximize the benefits and address challenges and risks?</li> <li>• What are the major challenges for such cooperation? How can Thailand and the U.S. overcome these challenges?</li> </ul> <p><i>For the Thai side:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the priorities of the Thailand 4.0 policy, including investment incentives for 10 priority industries (old and new S-curve) and economic activities in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC)?</li> <li>• What are the implications for U.S. companies and investors?</li> </ul>
3:30 – 4:15 PM	<p>Small group discussions to develop practical recommendations</p> <p><b>Small groups Day 2</b> – Delegates will be asked in advance to select the functional area that they would like to focus on for development of practical recommendations. Delegates will move to designated room/location for their functional group. Rapporteur for each group will capture each recommendation as discussed. Draft text of recommendations will immediately be posted on closed access platform for the event, and available for delegates and organizers to access/review.</p>
4:30 – 5:30 PM	<p><b>Recommendations for Strengthening the Thai-U.S. Relationship</b></p> <p>Moderator: Mr. John Brandon, Senior Director for International Relations Programs, The Asia Foundation</p> <p>Thai Perspectives:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Chuan Leekpai, Former Prime Minister of Thailand</li> </ul> <p>U.S. Perspectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambassador Stapleton Roy, Former Founding Director and Distinguished Scholar, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars</li> </ul> <p>Open Discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific suggestions and recommendations for strengthening Thailand-U.S. cooperation? What instruments, mechanisms, and resources need to be developed, improved, or enhanced to realize these shared goals.</li> <li>• Towards what ends would you wish to see Thailand-U.S. relations develop? What mutually added benefits would be attained with the two countries working more closely together?</li> <li>• What do you see as the main challenges in achieving those ends? What additional preparation, coordination, or collaboration are needed to overcome these challenges?</li> </ul> <p>Closing Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Thomas Parks, Thailand Country Representative, The Asia Foundation</li> </ul>
6:30 – 8:30 PM	<b>Reception hosted by Ambassador Virachai Plasai</b>