

Book reviews

Storey, I. (2015). *Thailand's Post-Coup Relations with China and America: More Beijing, Less Washington*. (Trends in Southeast Asia #20). Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

This recent publication offers an intriguing external perspective on Thailand's political changes in the recent past. Ian Storey focuses on the period since the May 2014 coup. He examines tensions between the U.S. and Thailand that began even before the coup, as the two countries' interests diverged in regard to their position towards China. Specifically, Thailand has not fully supported the U.S. "pivot" policy that seeks to strengthen formal ties with its Asian allies in light of China's perceived strategic threat. This is because China has become an increasingly strong ally for Thailand, particularly in terms of trade and other economic issues but also militarily. The U.S. condemnation of the military junta's takeover and the slowness of any return to democracy have exacerbated this strained relationship. Another blow to relations between the two countries occurred when the U.S. State Department placed Thailand on the Tier 3 watch list in its *2015 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* for the second year. The Thai government felt that its major efforts to reduce trafficking since the 2014 TIP report had gone unrecognized, especially compared with surrounding countries such as Malaysia and Myanmar which are given Tier 2 status (according to some, for the U.S.' own strategic reasons). Military cooperation, long a feature of the U.S.-Thai relationship, suffered during this period; and the strength of Thailand's current ties with China lead some to conjecture that China may replace the U.S. military's presence in some strategic locations.

Storey maintains that the underlying current affecting all aspects of the U.S.-Thai relationship is their "diverging threat perceptions" of China. While the U.S. sees China as a competitor and strategic threat, Thailand has received support from China throughout recent political turmoil. No criticisms of the military government or calls to return to democracy are heard from this ally; only swift recognition of the new government and continued normal bilateral relations. Trade and investment links have strengthened. Storey provides many examples of evidence of the China-Thai relationship, including the return of Uighur refugees to China, the establishment of joint Thai-Chinese air force training exercises, the "rice for rail" agreement, and others.

This publication series from the ISEAS–Yusof Isak Institute has included articles with clear explanations and straightforward analysis of Thailand's recent political history. They are understandable for those who know little about Thai politics or for those who have been mystified by recent events. We recommend this series, both for academics and for the general reader, and look forward to additional publications as they become available.

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