

Hello *Sightlines* readers!

Someone at the US state department must have had an extra pumpkin latte this week, my editor quipped, because they have certainly been busy issuing a flurry of condemnations against Cambodia and sanctions for two military officials.

The state department made several major announcements, [warning](#) American businesses operating in the Kingdom to be wary of the "systemic corruption, transnational organised crime, and human rights abuses, threaten[ing] both US national security interests and the fundamental freedoms of people in Cambodia". Despite ongoing US concerns about the status quo, the state department noted "no meaningful changes" have occurred.

Another point of contention focused on alleged "corrupt acts" related to the Ream Naval Base in Sihanoukville, long a sore spot in US-Cambodia relations given American fears that China [secretly](#) secured exclusive access to a portion of the base. The US embassy believes the construction [benefits](#) the Chinese military, which Cambodia denies. Among the ongoing geo-political tensions, the US leveled [sanctions](#) against navy commander Tea Vinh and Chau Phirun, the director-general of the defense ministry's material and technical services department, accusing them of using the Ream construction for personal enrichment. The sanctions freeze any US assets they have, but also effectively serves as "a financial death sentence" by preventing sanctioned officials from engaging with US financial institutions and from using US funds for wires, checks and credit, the *Globe* previously [reported](#).

The US also plans to review its reauthorisation of Cambodia's eligibility for the Generalised System of Preferences ([GSP](#)), which offers reduced export duties to promote economic growth in developing countries. The [World Bank](#) reported the US is the Kingdom's largest export market. Cambodia [lost](#) partial access to trade

preferences for exports to the European Union through the Everything But Arms programme last year over human rights concerns, though this likely had more [impact](#) on Cambodians employed in garment factories than elites triggering corruption and human rights allegations.

Cambodia's human rights issues and penchant for corruption are hardly news, but the US decision to increase the stakes by calling out suspect practices and applying significant consequences to those involved with the Ream naval base could signal another indirect shot at China.

The diplomatic announcements were among several engaging international stories this week. As the UN's COP26 climate conference wraps up, our lead feature examines Thailand's hydropower deals with Laos, receiving far more than appears necessary. Check out the story and our other feature articles and opinion essays this week.