Stimson Center Statement Delivered at the 3rd Mekong River Commission Summit Ministerial Meeting  
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Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests, it is an honor to represent the Stimson Center, a U.S.-based think tank located in Washington, D.C., here at the 3rd Mekong Summit.

The results of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat’s “Council Study” clearly reveal how trade-offs to water security, energy security, and food security under the business-as-usual development trajectory for the Mekong Basin are not optimized. Signals are particularly dire for impacts to wild fish catches and downstream sediment delivery. With the results of the MRCS Council Study in hand, it is now incumbent for member governments and dialogue partners to incorporate the quantified outcomes of this study into planning and decision-making processes.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests, we now live in an era where it is possible to both develop economically together and optimize the tradeoffs to the food-water-energy nexus. This optimization can improve livelihoods for all and help countries meet SDG and Paris Agreement NDCs.

To achieve this optimization, we can take advantage of, first, innovations in non-hydropower renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and biomass and rethink how these renewables complement and compete with hydropower generation. Second, innovations in system-scale, basin-wide planning and data analysis that incorporate renewable energy options and prioritize multiple uses of water can support the design of alternative development scenarios for the basin. Third, we can take advantage of new momentum pushing forward cross-border power trade, a regional power grid, and importantly, decentralized transmission and distribution systems that will allow countries to do more with less.

Packaging these innovations together will allow us to work together through stakeholder-led processes that can produce an optimized, alternative energy and water development blueprint for the entirety of the Mekong Basin. This blueprint will guide investment, lower cumulative costs, reduce delays, and result in a greatly improved set of social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

By working together to achieve these outcomes, we can reinvigorate the Mekong Spirit and conserve the ecological integrity that underpins security and stability in the Mekong Basin.