

Special Report

Thailand-Cambodia Conflict

Prepared by,
Huzaifa Khan
Junior Risk Analyst



Executive Summary

- Thailand and Cambodia have entered their most intense military confrontation in over a decade, with clashes since 24 July spreading to 12 border locations, causing over 30 deaths and displacing over 170,000 civilians. Thailand's acting Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai has warned that the conflict "could escalate into a state of war."
- The conflict is rooted in colonial-era border disputes, particularly over Preah Vihear and Ta Muen Thom temples, with Cambodia favoring international mediation and Thailand insisting on bilateral resolution while rejecting ICJ rulings.
- A landmine blast on 23 Jul and a leaked political scandal involving Thailand's suspended PM have further destabilized diplomacy, prompting martial law in eight Thai districts, border closures, and severe disruption to trade and logistics.
- Cambodia has called for an unconditional ceasefire; Thailand has shown rare openness to Malaysia-led mediation, while US President Donald Trump's claim that both countries are willing to reach an immediate ceasefire has not proven true yet. On the other hand, China, with deep regional stakes, maintains neutrality but could intervene if escalation continues.
- The conflict poses a high risk to businesses, with significant impact on cross-border trade, investment, and travel, particularly as both countries brace for U.S. tariffs and economic slowdown from 01 August onward.

Introduction

On 24 Jul, Thailand and Cambodia engaged in a fresh round of skirmishes along their disputed border, which has now escalated into a conflict that has now entered day four. The fighting, though controllable so far, is the largest in a decade, raising concerns that it can turn into a war. The number of casualties and locations along the border where the conflict is currently being pursued have increased as well since the start of the conflict on Thursday. However, the present conflict, despite being attributed to the recent incident of landmine explosion that injured five Thai soldiers, has been in the making for some time now.

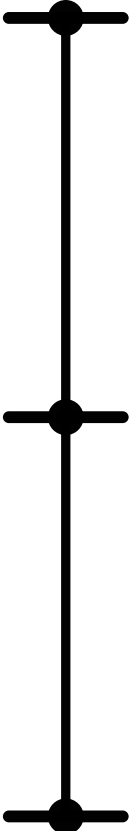
The position of border security forces was advanced by both sides more than a month ago, with partial restrictions on bilateral trade already in place. The political scandal involving Thailand's PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra (suspended and facing a no-confidence motion) and Cambodia's former leader, Hun Sen, has created domestic challenges for Bangkok, and not any less for Shinawatra and her party. Thailand's history of political instability and the influential role of its military institution present a domestic challenge for Thailand. Additionally, both Cambodia and Thailand are bracing for a 36% US tariff from 01 Aug amidst economic slowdown, making the present conflict more expensive than it already is.

However, there are also signs of possible de-escalation in the next few days, albeit with a high degree of uncertainty. Cambodia has expressed its willingness to cease fire immediately, and Thailand has softened its stance against third-party mediation to achieve a ceasefire, possibly with the help of Malaysia. However, for that to happen, the fighting will have to reduce in scale and intensity. Additionally, the claim by the US President Donald Trump that both sides are willing to reach a ceasefire was proven to be overly optimistic as the fighting continued on 27 Jul along the border.

Background

The latest conflict is a product of a long-standing, unresolved border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia. The two countries share a border that stretches nearly 508 miles (817 kilometers) and was mapped by France during its colonial rule in Cambodia from 1863 to 1953. Between 1904 and 1907, several treaties were signed between the French protectorate in Cambodia and Siam (Thailand). These treaties defined the boundaries between the two countries that were later contested by Thailand for being unfair due to a relatively weaker position of the Siam state during French colonial rule in Cambodia.

Preah Vihear Temple and 2008-2011 Clashes



The demarcation of boundaries was such that it left several historical and religious sites in contested areas. Amongst them is the Preah Vihear Temple—a 1,000-year-old Hindu site built by the Khmer Empire, and located on a cliff on Cambodia's Dangrek mountains. The temple is claimed by the nationalists from both countries, making it a significant flashpoint in the ongoing and past conflicts, including any attempt at conflict resolution.

In 2008, Cambodia succeeded in getting the UNESCO World Heritage Site status for the temple, in addition to a previous ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that recognized the temple as a part of Cambodia. UNESCO status for the temple triggered a series of sporadic military clashes that lasted until 2011. In 2013, the ICJ again declared the Preah Vihear temple to be a part of Cambodia.

Cambodia, therefore, has often looked for third-party mediation for the settlement of boundary disputes, as that has traditionally favored its territorial claims. Thailand, on the other hand, has remained skeptical of any third-party mediation, calling for non-interference and bilateral negotiations to resolve the conflict. Thailand also does not recognize the ICJ rulings on Preah Vihear temple.

Current Situation

The ongoing clashes have resulted in a military and diplomatic crisis between Bangkok and Phnom Penh that has not been seen in over a decade. On 24 Jul, fresh clashes broke out on the border between Thailand's Surin province and Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province, in the vicinity of the Ta Muen Thom temple. As of 27 Jul, the clashes have spread to 12 areas along the border, with both sides deploying heavy weaponry, including multiple-launch rocket systems, artillery, and armored vehicles, including tanks.

Casualties Displacement Martial Law

The number of people that have died in the latest conflict has risen over 30, a figure greater than what was recorded during the three years of sporadic clashes (28) between 2008 and 2011. In addition to that, the fighting has forced more than 138,000 people to be evacuated from Thailand's border regions, with more than 35,000 driven from their homes in Cambodia. Additionally, Thailand has declared martial law in eight districts bordering Cambodia (Chanthaburi province: Mueang Chanthaburi, Tha Mai, Makham, Laem Sing, Kaeng Hang Maew, Na Yai Am, and Khao Khitchakut).

US-brokered Ceasefire

On 26 Jul, the US President Donald Trump claimed that both Thailand and Cambodia have agreed to hold talks to achieve a ceasefire. In a post on Truth Social, Trump said he held two separate telephonic conversations with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Thailand's acting Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai, wherein both had agreed to immediately negotiate a ceasefire. However, even after this, heavy cross-border attacks between Thailand and Cambodia continued into 27 Jul 2025, marking the fourth straight day of conflict.



Escalation Matrix

- Both sides have blamed each other for starting the fresh conflict. Cambodia has accused Thailand of using cluster munitions that are banned in over 100 countries for their indiscriminate nature and high risk of harming civilians. Thailand has accused Cambodia of targeting civilians.
- According to Thai authorities, BM-21 rocket attacks by Cambodia reportedly missed Thai military targets and instead struck civilian zones in Surin province, damaging properties near Ta Muen Thom temple. Cambodia's artillery fire caused structural fires in Ban Ta Sor village (Prasat District). Thailand also positioned six F-16 fighter jets in an uncommon combat deployment, one of which was mobilised to strike a Cambodian military target.
- On 25 Jul, Thailand's acting Prime Minister Phumtham warned, "the situation has intensified and could escalate into a state of war. At present, it's a confrontation involving heavy weapons."

Active Conflict Zones



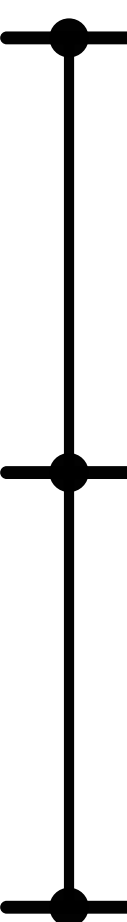
12 Active Conflict Zones



1. Ta Muen Thom (Ta Moan Thom) Temple – Oddar Meanchey Province (Cambodia) / Surin Province (Thailand)
2. Ta Krabey (Ta Krabei) Temple – same general area as Oddar Meanchey–Surin
3. Preah Vihear Temple vicinity – Preah Vihear Province (Cambodia) / Si Sa Ket Province (Thailand)
4. Chong Bok (Chang Bok) pass – Dangrek Mountains near the tripoint
5. Chong An Ma – along the border districts in Si Sa Ket / Oddar Meanchey region
6. Chong Jom – Surin Province (Thailand) crossing O Smach area
7. Trat Province (Thailand) – further south extension of clashes
8. Buriram Province (Thailand) – along the northeastern belts adjacent to Cambodia
9. Ubon Ratchathani Province (Thailand) – perennial zone near Preah Vihear and Chang Bok region
10. Sisaket Province (Thailand) – location of multiple civilian strikes, including rocket attacks on a petrol station
11. Pursat Province (Cambodia) – one of the new areas where Cambodia reports clashes
12. Additional undefined flashpoint zones in Oddar Meanchey Province and Preah Vihear Province beyond temple sites, cited as new areas of clashes, as the conflict widened.

Causes of Conflict

Timeline- Present Conflict



On 28 May, Cambodian and Thai soldiers engaged in a brief 10-minute skirmish along the border of Cambodia's Preah Vihear province and Thailand's Ubon Ratchathani province, resulting in the death of one Cambodian soldier. Both countries claimed the other was the aggressor. Attempts at a diplomatic solution to the dispute have failed. On 07 Jun, Thailand reinforced its military presence along the border, and so did Cambodia.

On 01 Jul, Thailand's PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra was suspended by the country's Constitutional Court, following a leaked phone call with Cambodia's former leader Hun Sen. In the leaked call, which took place on 15 Jun, Paetongtarn could be heard calling former Cambodian strongman Hun Sen "uncle" and appeared to criticize her own army's actions after border clashes led to the death of a Cambodian soldier last month. The incident led to the largest partner of Thailand's ruling coalition withdrawing its support and sparked protests calling for the Prime Minister's resignation.

The immediate cause of the latest conflict can be attributed to the landmine explosion along the border on 23 Jul that injured 5 Thai soldiers. Thailand accused Cambodia of laying new landmines along the border, while Cambodia denied the allegations, saying that the mines were left over from Cambodia's decades-long civil war, and accusing Thai soldiers of deviating from the agreed-upon patrol routes.

Diplomatic Crisis

Thailand, in response, closed all border crossings in its northeast, withdrew its envoy from Cambodia, and expelled the Cambodian ambassador. Thailand also closed access to Ta Muen Thom temple for Cambodian citizens. Meanwhile, the Thai army- a powerful actor in the country- activated its Chakrapong Phuwanart" emergency plan, which calls on the 1st and 2nd army regions, which are responsible for the Central Plains and the Northeast, respectively, to prepare for immediate deployment. Cambodia, on the other hand, downgraded its diplomatic ties with Thailand to the Second Charge d'Affaires level and recalled the diplomatic staff in Bangkok. This is considered the worst diplomatic crisis after 2008-2011 conflict between the two neighbours.

Political and Military Responses

On 25 Jul, Thailand's acting prime minister Phumtham Wechayachai warned that the fighting could “move into a war”, as it had spread to 12 locations now. The confrontation now involves heavy weapons, he added. Cambodia, on the other hand, has accused Thailand of using banned cluster munitions. Cluster munitions are banned in much of the world because of their indiscriminate effect on civilian populations. Thailand has not responded to the latest accusations.

On 25 Jul, Thailand's Phumtham Wechayachai accused Cambodia of war crimes due to the deaths of civilians and damage caused to a hospital. Thailand has consistently maintained that Cambodia initiated the conflict. Cambodia has refuted the claims as false and misleading, with Cambodia's UN ambassador highlighting its country's inferior military position as the reason for Cambodia for not initiating the conflict and playing only a defensive role.

Prospects of De-escalation

On 25 Jul, after the closed UNSC meeting, Cambodia's UN ambassador Chhea Keo said to the press, “Cambodia asked for an immediate ceasefire – unconditionally – and we also call for the peaceful solution of the dispute.” Additionally, earlier in the day, before the UNSC meeting, the Thai Foreign Ministry spokesman Nikorndej Balankura had reportedly said that Bangkok was open to talks, possibly aided by Malaysia.

“We are ready, if Cambodia would like to settle this matter via diplomatic channels, bilaterally, or even through Malaysia, we are ready to do that. But so far we have not had any response,” said Balankura. However, so far, the two sides have not ceased attacks against each other's military positions.

Travel Advisories

USA



On 25 July, the United States Embassy & Consulate in Thailand updated its travel advisory in view of the ongoing situation near the Thailand-Cambodia Border.

U.S. citizens are advised to avoid all travel to the area within 50 kilometers of the Thailand-Cambodia border due to ongoing military conflict in the region. Today, July 25, the Royal Thai Government ordered the full shutdown of border crossings in both Chanthaburi and Trat provinces, including both land and maritime routes. The Ministry of Public Health announced full or partial closure of 11 hospitals within the border region and the Ministry of Education announced the temporary closure of 751 schools across the provinces of Ubon Ratchathani, Sisaket, Buri Ram, Surin, Sa Kaeo and Chanthaburi.

U.S. citizens living or traveling in the affected areas should follow direction from Thai security services and consult local government authorities for the latest information.

*For Assistance:
U.S. Embassy Bangkok
02-205-4000*

United Kingdom



On 25 July, the UK issued a travel advisory for citizens in the affected countries.

Land borders/crossings between Thailand and Cambodia are temporarily suspended due to a dispute between Thailand and Cambodia. Take extra care and stay alert in border areas and follow the instructions of local authorities, especially at tourist destinations such as the Preah Vihear temple, the Ta Kwai temple and the Ta Muen Thom temple. There are also unexploded landmines in the border area. Stay on marked paths especially around Ta Krabey.

Travel Advisories

India



On 25 July, Indian Embassy in Thailand issued travel advisory following ongoing unrest along the Thai–Cambodian border.

In view of the situation near the Thailand–Cambodia border, all Indian travelers to Thailand are advised to check updates from Thai official sources, including TAT Newsroom.

Due to ongoing unrest along the Thai–Cambodian border, please note that several attractions in 7 provinces are now not recommended for visiting:

Ubon Ratchathani

- *Phu Chong Na Yoi National Park (Na Chaluai)*
- *Kaeng Lamduan (Nam Yuen)*
- *Chong An Ma Checkpoint (Nam Yuen)*

Surin

- *Prasat Ta Muen Thom/Tod*
- *Prasat Ta Kwai*
- *Prasat Ban Pluang*
- *Prasat Phum Pon*
- *Chong Chom*
- *Phanom Swai Forest Park*
- *Phanom Dong Rak border zones*

Sisaket

- *Khao Phra Wihan NP (Pha Mo I Daeng)*
- *Chong Sa-ngam*
- *Border areas near Kantharalak & Phu Sing*

Buriram

- *Chong Sai Taku*
- *Ta Phraya NP*
- *Border zones near Ban Kruat & Lahan Sai*

Sa Kaeo

- *Ban Khlong Luek Checkpoint & Rong Kluea Market*
- *Prasat Sdok Kok Thom*
- *Border zones near Aranyaprathet & Khlong Hat*

Chanthaburi

- *Ban Laem & Ban Phat Kad checkpoints*
- *Border zones near Pong Nam Ron & Soi Dao*
- *Trat*
- *Ban Hat Lek, Ban Muen Dan & Ban Ma Muang checkpoints*

Assessment & Forecast



- We assess that the ongoing conflict poses a high level of risk for businesses engaged in cross-border trade, investment, and travel between Thailand and Cambodia, due to the high likelihood of the conflict escalating further into a quasi-war, as no certain political action has been taken to bring in effect the attempted ceasefire.
- Furthermore, the US and China in the present conflict can play an important role in case the conflict escalates, mainly as mediators, as both have close political and economic ties with both the warring countries. China has openly declared its impartial stance in the present conflict for the same reason.
- Thailand is a treaty ally of the US. However, the US is unlikely to take a stance against Cambodia despite the latter's close affinity with China.
- Additionally, the success of Malaysia in mediating the present conflict hinges on Thailand's willingness to allow third-party mediation that it has traditionally avoided.

FORECAST

Short-term (0 to 2 weeks):

- Continued border skirmishes are likely unless immediate US or Malaysian mediation leads to a ceasefire.
- Further displacement and humanitarian concerns will rise.
- Trade, logistics, and travel in border regions will remain disrupted.
- High unlikelyhood of any resolution to the present boundary conflict.

Medium-term (1 to 3 months):

- Diplomatic re-engagement is possible under international pressure, with Malaysia's mediation offering the most viable path.
- Tensions may be weaponized domestically in Thai politics, especially amid the PM's suspension and military assertiveness.

Long-term:

- Unless a formal demarcation mechanism is internationally enforced, the conflict risks becoming cyclical with repeated flare-ups.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Huzaifa Khan serves as a Junior Risk Analyst at WoRisGo for the South Asia region. He has a Master's degree in International Relations and Area Studies from Jamia Millia Islamia University. With his strong grasp of IR theories and geopolitics, he likes to study the impact of complex socio-economic and political world events on business operations and their continuity. He has previously worked as a GPRA intern, after working as a journalism intern at two organisations.

