

Thailand's Internal Power Struggles Fuel War with Cambodia

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From diplomatic embarrassment to the brink of war, Thailand has demonstrated a troubling contempt for international norms and regional stability. Its reaction to the May 28 border clash is less about national security than political survival. With a fractured government losing its grip and a military emboldened by surging nationalism, war offers a convenient distraction—and, for some in power, a strategic opportunity.

Why would Thailand risk open conflict now, amid such domestic volatility? The answer lies in a pattern of deliberate actions that suggest escalation by design—not accident.

On June 15, Cambodia turned to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) after bilateral talks through the Joint Boundary Commission repeatedly collapsed. Thailand immediately rejected the ICJ's jurisdiction, insisting on direct negotiations—an approach that sidesteps third-party oversight and echoes past failures to assert its territorial claims on legal grounds.

Then came the ceasefire farce. On July 24, Thailand initially agreed to a truce proposed by the ASEAN Chair and Malaysian **Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim**. Just [one hour later](#), Bangkok abruptly backed out, claiming it needed “more time.” The timing was suspect—and so was the explanation.

Shortly afterward, **former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra** [posted a statement on social media](#) that raised eyebrows and tempers:

“Many countries are concerned about the fighting situation between Thailand and Cambodia and have offered to help mediate. So I thanked everyone, but I asked for some time—because I have to let the Thai military teach him a lesson for his cunningness.”

The reference to “him” was widely interpreted as a personal jab at Cambodia's leadership. Coming from Thaksin—whose influence still shapes Thailand's political landscape—and given the [close ties between Acting Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai and the Shinawatra family](#), the suggestion was unmistakable: this may not be a war of states, but of vendettas. Critics within Thailand are already asking whether this is a conflict between rival dynasties, not sovereign nations. If so, it is ordinary citizens and soldiers who will pay the price.

Thailand's behavior has revealed the stark gap between its stated desire for peace and its actions on the ground. On July 23, Bangkok expelled Cambodian diplomats, downgraded relations, and urged Thai nationals to flee Cambodia—a dramatic move typically reserved

for imminent conflict. The next day, Thai forces launched a coordinated strike, including F-16 fighter jets. Calling this a defensive act stretches plausibility. These were not panicked maneuvers; they were precision operations—prepared in advance and executed with chilling efficiency.

The insistence on bilateralism, far from being a sign of diplomatic good faith, has become a shield against accountability. Inside Thailand, the government is under siege—politically and literally. Martial law was declared in the border provinces on July 25, handing sweeping powers to the military. By July 26, even as [U.S. President Donald Trump called for peace talks and offered to mediate](#), Thailand [escalated its offensive](#). Cambodia welcomed negotiations; Thailand continued bombing.

This disconnect speaks volumes. Civilian leaders say one thing. The military does another.

In truth, this war serves two purposes: for the Shinawatra-aligned government, it's payback for past diplomatic defeats; for the military, it's a chance to consolidate power behind a nationalist banner. What unites them is not strategy—but self-interest. And what suffers, once again, is peace.

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