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When the temples are still bleeding: Thailand-Cambodia, a war of memories

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Thailand • Cambodia • Memories

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Abstract

The armed clashes between Thailand and Cambodia in 2025 cannot be reduced to a simple border dispute. They are part of a deep historical rivalry, regularly reactivated by domestic political dynamics, cross-border economic interests and fragile governance. The border serves less as a cause than as a catalyst, offering a breeding ground for crises of legitimacy in Bangkok and Phnom Penh. ASEAN's inability to prevent escalation and the increasing reliance on external mediation, particularly from China and the United States, underscore the limits of regional security mechanisms. In the absence of a structural treatment of internal vulnerabilities, the conflict is bound to recur, to the detriment of the populations living in the borders area.

When the temples are still bleeding: Thailand-Cambodia, a war of memories

Arnaud Leveau, PhD

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I. A long-standing dispute

The clashes that are once again bloodied on the border between Thailand and Cambodia are not an accident. They are the culmination of a long history of rivalry, mistrust and conflict that took root long before modern maps were drawn. At the heart of this dispute is a collective memory that has its roots between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. During this period, as the Khmer Empire of Angkor began to show signs of decline, Thai-speaking populations from Guangxi, Guizhou and Yunnan accelerated a southward migration. These groups gradually established their own kingdoms, extending their influence to the western margins of Khmer territory. This fundamental historical dynamic, a Thai push in the face of a Khmer withdrawal, has left a deep imprint. The etymology of Siem Reap**,** the city that gives access to the temples of Angkor, still bears witness to this. Its name, often interpreted as "the defeat of Siam", commemorates a Cambodian military victory and crystallizes the memory of a centuries-old competition for territory and influence[1].

This age-old competition is not limited to past battles; it extends into cultural symbolism and heritage appropriation. Thus, the presence of a model of Angkor Wat in the grounds of the Royal Palace in Bangkok, erected during the reign of King Rama IV in the mid-nineteenth century, illustrates this complex dynamic. For Siam, this reproduction could embody both a tribute to the Khmer architectural genius and an affirmation of its historical suzerainty over Cambodian territories. For Cambodia, it remains perceived as an attempt to symbolically appropriate a national heritage at the heart of its identity[2].

This ancestral rivalry was frozen, and partly exacerbated, by the intervention of the colonial powers. The disputed border line today is largely the result of the Franco-Siamese Treaty of 1907[3]. For Thailand, this route is still perceived as a colonial-era imposition and a lasting source of contention[4]. The brief French-Thai War of 1940-1941 allowed Thailand to temporarily recover the provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap. However, at the end of the Second World War, Thailand was forced to return these territories to Cambodia under joint pressure from the Allied powers, in particular the United States and the United Kingdom, which conditioned diplomatic normalization and Bangkok's accession to the new international institutions on respect for the borders inherited from the colonial order. This sequence has left a deep resentment on the Thai side, fed by the feeling of a historical injustice imposed from outside[5].

In the second half of the twentieth century, the conflict moved to the courtroom without being settled. The 1962 ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), confirming Cambodian sovereignty over the temple of Preah Vihear, was a major legal turning point. However, the clarification provided by a second

[1] Winichakul, T. (1994). Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation. University of Hawaii Press.
[2] Thompson, A. (2004). The Future of Cambodia's Past: A Messianic Middle-Cambodian Royal Cult. In J. Marston, & E. Guthrie (Eds.), History, Buddhism and New Religious Movements in Cambodia (pp. 13-39). University of Hawaii Press.
[3] Briggs, L. P. (1946). The treaty of March 23, 1907, between France and Siam and the return of Battambang and Angkor to Cambodia. The Journal of Asian Studies, 5(4), 439–454.
[4] Matsunuma, M., & Séguela, M. (2015). Recognition of sovereignty or territorial greatness? The delimitation of the borders between Siam and French Indochina in 1907. Outre-Mers: Revue d'Histoire, 102(386-387), 205-225.
[5] Malakul Na Ayuthya, P. (1991). Indochina in Franco-Thai Relations (1938-1946) (Doctoral thesis, University of Paris 7). Thèses.fr.

ruling in 2013 was not enough to ease tensions[6]. The area has remained a powder keg, as tragically demonstrated by the violent exchanges of artillery between 2008 and 2011, which left dozens dead. The open crisis of 2025, with its large-scale fighting and hundreds of thousands of displaced people, is therefore not an anomaly. This crisis is part of a long series of resurgences, where old border disputes are regularly revived, often at the whim of internal political calculations, in Bangkok as well as in Phnom Penh[7].

The current dispute over the Ta Kwai (Ta Moan) temple and certain border "grey zones" is, in essence, only a contemporary manifestation of a much deeper rivalry. A technical agreement on the route, even if legally concluded, would not be enough to dispel the structural mistrust between the two countries. Otherwise, another point of friction would emerge, as the bilateral relationship is based on a historical mistrust that has been permanently inscribed in the political imagination.

II. 2025: The spark that reignited the fire

The escalation of the summer of 2025 has its origins in a calculated audio leak: a phone conversation between former Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and Cambodian Senate President Hun Sen. In it, Paetongtarn was heard adopting a very conciliatory, even deferential ("uncle") tone on sensitive border issues. This leak, acknowledged by Hun Sen[8], was a formidable political weapon. In Thailand, it was seen as a betrayal of national interests, precipitated Paetongtarn's suspension by the Constitutional Court and accelerated the break-up of her governing coalition.

Hun Sen, president of the Senate and father of current Prime Minister Hun Manet, reiterated this method by recently publishing photographs showing Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul alongside politicians including the governor of Pailin province[9]. In doing so, Hun Sen is deliberately undermining his long-term diplomatic credibility: whose international leader will still agree to exchange in trust if there is a risk that the exchanges will be recorded and then instrumentalized for political purposes? It is revealing, in this regard, that Prime Minister Hun Manet remains in the background on this sensitive issue, leaving his father, a historical figure of the regime to expose himself on the front line.

However, this reading does not exclude other interpretations. While Hun Sen's personal role appears central to the current sequence, it is also part of broader institutional and historical logics, specific to the functioning of the Cambodian political system. The instrumentalization of informal channels, personal relationships and strategic communication is not only an individual initiative, but refers to a sustainable political culture, where the personalization of power, personal loyalty and the porosity between the private sphere and public action are structural features of the regime[10].

III. Cambodian reasons: diversion, economy and settling of scores

The Cambodian authorities are facing increasing international pressure related to the persistence of cybercrime centres operating on their territory. These transnational networks, commonly referred to as *scam centres*, are associated with documented practices of human trafficking[11], forced labour, and large-

[6] International Court of Justice. (n.d.). Case No. 45 — Temple of Preah Vihear (Cambodia v. Thailand).
[7] Leveau, A. (2025, July 10). Cambodia–Thailand: A-e border crisis masking deeper fault lines (Brief No. 15). Asia Centre.
[8] Siow, M., Jones, A., & Agencies. (2025, July 1). Thai court suspends PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra over leaked phone call. South China Morning Post.
[9] Phnom Penh Post. (2025, December). Hun Sen asks how Anutin can exchange lives for votes. Phnom Penh Post.
[10] International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2023, July 26). Cambodia's political succession and the next government's external policies. Strategic Comments.
[11] Amnesty International. (2025). I was someone else's property: How Cambodia allows slavery and torture to flourish inside scamming compounds (Report No. ASA 23/9447/2025)

scale fraud[12]. Several recent reports by international organizations[13] and NGOs highlight the involvement, directly or indirectly, of actors linked to the state apparatus in the protection or tolerance of these activities[14]. The media attention given to certain central figures of these networks, including a South African national naturalized Cambodian, has increased the international visibility of these issues[15]. In this context, the remobilisation of a border dispute with Thailand can be interpreted as responding to a logic of strategic rebalancing. For a State with asymmetrical means vis-à-vis its neighbour, the reactivation of a territorial and patrimonial dispute offers a lever to reaffirm its sovereignty, strengthen national consensus and reconfigure the international political agenda. This dynamic should not be confused with Cambodian society itself, the first victim of criminal economies and regional instability.

This climate of tension is also fuelled by growing discontent on the Cambodian side with what is perceived as a Thai attempt to appropriate or requalify central symbols of Khmer culture[16]. This perception is reinforced by the role played by Thai political actors closely linked to the border provinces, first and foremost Anutin Charnvirakul and his political mentor Newin Chidchob, a dominant figure in Buriram province. The promotion of sites, historical narratives or cultural elements located in these border areas is interpreted in Phnom Penh not as a neutral heritage approach, but as an extension of local and national political strategies aimed at consolidating a symbolic influence on historically disputed spaces. In this context, culture becomes a field of rivalry in its own right, where identity affirmation, internal political calculations and territorial issues are superimposed.

The promotion of cultural heritage also plays a strategic role in Cambodian communication. By placing the clashes in a civilizational and memorial register, the authorities sought to internationalize the conflict and mobilize support beyond the strictly bilateral framework. This heritage reading, widely relayed in the Cambodian media, contributes to strengthening the legitimacy of the official discourse within the country, while presenting Cambodia as a defensive State confronted with repeated attacks on its historical heritage.

The economic dimension is just as decisive. Cambodia's economy, especially in border towns such as Poipet, relies heavily on casino activity and opaque financial flows, often backed by Chinese capital. In 2024 and the first half of 2025, Thailand has seriously considered the legalization of casinos through the Entertainment *Complex Bill*. However, this legislative process was suspended in July 2025[17]. In the long term, if this project were to be revived, the combination of superior infrastructure and a much stronger tourist attractiveness would put Thailand in a position to capture a significant share of the regional clientele, particularly Chinese, who are currently oriented towards Cambodian casinos, and to position itself as a credible competitor to Singapore and Macau. This prospect is causing obvious concern among Cambodia's economic elites and their Chinese partners.

Finally, the personal dimension cannot be ignored. The old friendship between Thaksin Shinawatra (the patriarch of the Shinawatra clan) and Hun Sen (who had offered him asylum after the 2006 coup) turned into resentment. The reasons for this quarrel are both personal conflicts and political disagreements.

[12] The Diplomat. (2025, June 6). Cambodia allowing abuses to flourish in online scam compounds, rights group says.
[13] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. (2023). Casinos, cyber fraud and trafficking in persons for forced criminality in Southeast Asia: Policy Report (Policy Report). United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
[14] The Conversation. (2025, June 7). Cambodia is vowing to rid the country of scam compounds — but we've seen several still operating in the open. The Conversation
[15] Adamović Davies, J. (2025, December 1). Is Cambodia's scam industry too big to fail? New sanctions on the world's wealthiest criminal could threaten the Hun dynasty. Foreign Policy.
[16] Adextra Mission. (2025, July 11). Cambodia calls on UNESCO on a Thai replica of the Angkor Wat temple. Adextra Mission.
[17] AP News. (2025, July 8). Thailand's Cabinet withdraws a controversial bill to legalize casinos. Associated Press.

Bringing down the daughter (Paetongtarn) and weakening the Shinawatra camp is also, for Hun Sen, a way of settling these old scores.

At the same time, Phnom Penh has intensified its diplomatic and media lobbying efforts in order to influence international perceptions of the conflict. Tribunes, public positions and opinion relays aim to present Cambodia as a victim of repeated aggression and to internationalize the responsibility for the escalation. This communication strategy illustrates the way in which the conflict is also played out in the field of narratives, in an increasingly polarized information environment[18].

IV. Thai reasons: domestic politics and national affirmation

On the Thai side, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul (Bhumjaithai) is also navigating a complex political landscape. At the head of a minority executive exposed to a motion of censure, he chose to dissolve the Parliament and to announce early parliamentary elections scheduled for the beginning of 2026[19]. This decision opens a prolonged campaign phase, during which firmness on sovereign and border issues becomes a central political marker. In this context, a posture of force vis-à-vis Cambodia appears electorally profitable, both with conservative circles, the army and a part of the urban middle classes sensitive to the themes of order, security and national dignity.

However, this firm stance is part of a broader context of institutional fragility. The multiplication of political crises and the recurrent use of judicial and security levers for political purposes weaken governance in the medium term. The crisis with Cambodia, while temporarily strengthening a posture of authority, also exposes the Thai executive to a risk of nationalist escalation that is difficult to contain in the long term[20].

The dissolution of parliament could also create a temporary institutional vacuum, likely to mechanically weaken civilian control over the management of the border crisis[21]. In such a context, the Thai army would have more room for manoeuvre in the conduct of operations and in defining the security posture vis-à-vis Cambodia. A configuration of this type, already observed during previous border tensions, would tend to favour more assertive military responses, sometimes to the detriment of rapid diplomatic sequences, and to reinforce the weight of security logics in political arbitrations.

This domestic dynamic is coupled with a broader recalibration of Thai foreign policy. Without breaking with the American alliance, Bangkok tends to relativize Washington's influence in its strategic hierarchy. Anutin's statements, following the Trump administration's announcement of new plans to raise tariffs, are in line with this[22]. By stating that Thailand could not depend on a single partner and that it would be able to find other trade opportunities, if necessary, he had clearly signalled a change in posture[23]. In this context, Donald Trump's personal intervention in favour of a ceasefire in 2025 was deemed useful, but insufficient to provide a lasting framework for the management of the crisis. The United States thus tends to appear more as an adjustment variable than as the central arbiter of regional balances.

On the diplomatic front, the expanded ceasefire agreement was signed on October 26, 2025, in Malaysia in the presence of the President of the United States, Donald Trump, was suspended by Thailand on

[18] The Nation Thailand. (2025, December 11). Cambodia steps up lobbying for Trump ceasefire call [Commentary]. The Nation Thailand.
[19] Channel NewsAsia. (2025, December 12). Thai PM Anutin moves to dissolve parliament, setting stage for elections; Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn has endorsed a decree to dissolve parliament. Channel NewsAsia.
[20] Kiripost. (2025, December). Is Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin gambling with the country to stay in power? Kiripost
[21] Sovitou, L. (2025). Thailand's renewed military escalation during domestic instability (CSEAS Commentary No. 54). Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Royal University of Phnom Penh.
[22] Balankura, N. (2025, November 13). PM wary of US tariff hike. Bangkok Post.
[23] Leveau, A. (2025, December 1). Asia Centre – Bangkok–Beijing banknotes: an extended strategic family. Asia Centre.

November 11, 2025, after a Thai soldier was injured by a mine explosion along the border. Since then, U.S. efforts to revive the ceasefire plan have had little effect. On December 12, 2025, President Trump said a little quickly that he had "very positive conversations" with Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and his Cambodian counterpart Hun Manet, saying on his Truth Social network that the two leaders were "ready for peace" and that they had agreed to cease hostilities and return to the peace agreement signed in Kuala Lumpur in October. However, neither Anutin nor Hun Manet confirmed the existence of such a commitment**,** and the facts on the ground quickly belied this announcement[24]. The next day, the Thai army carried out air strikes, including with F-16 fighters, against positions in Cambodia, while Phnom Penh reported bombing of civilian and military infrastructure. The relative failure of US initiatives to achieve a lasting de-escalation highlights the disconnect between Washington's diplomatic communication and the operational reality of the conflict. While calls for a ceasefire have made it possible to temporarily contain the clashes, they have not been accompanied by sufficient political or security levers to change the calculations of local actors in the long term.

This is where the Chinese factor becomes decisive. The Sino-Thai rapprochement that has been underway for several years since the 2014 coup d'état, and is now assumed at the highest symbolic and political level. China has become Thailand's main external centre of gravity. China finances infrastructure, irrigates industrial chains, fuels tourism and plays an increasing role in the security of the Mekong. For Thailand, this relationship is less a matter of alignment than of a logic of pragmatic backing: China offers immediate economic levers and strategic depth that neither Washington nor Europe are able to offer with the same speed.

In the dispute between Thailand and Cambodia, Beijing occupies an ambivalent but central position. On the one hand, China has no interest in a military escalation between two key partners in its continental posture in Southeast Asia. Border stability has become an economic imperative, particularly to secure logistics corridors, tourist flows and industrial investment. On the other hand, it does not intend to set itself up as a formal mediator, preferring to act by discreet signals, indirect pressure and regional relays. In this game, Thailand often appears to be a more reliable and structured interlocutor than Cambodia, which reinforces Thailand's room for manoeuvre while placing Cambodia in a position of greater vulnerability.

Finally, Thailand's stated desire to toughen its fight against *scam centres* is at the crossroads of these internal and external dynamics. The asset seizure operations, spectacular in their scale, more than $300 million recently[25], meet several simultaneous objectives: to restore the country's international image, to send a signal of security cooperation to China, and to weaken cross-border networks, part of the economic benefits of which benefit Cambodia. This offensive, which is expected to intensify in 2026, is part of a broader strategy to regain control of the grey margins of the Mekong, while serving the political interests of a Thai executive on the campaign trail.

In the run-up to the legislative elections, Anutin simultaneously articulated several lines of action. He asserts a firm stance on domestic issues, claims greater autonomy vis-à-vis the United States, cultivates a close but controlled relationship with Beijing and seeks to display his ability to regain control over criminal economies. In this context, the crisis with Cambodia appears less as an end in itself than as a symptom of the adjustments underway, where internal political dynamics, economic interests and geopolitical repositioning intersect.

[24] Keeton-Olsen D. & Phoung (2025, 13 December). Trump fails in renewed bid to end Thai-Cambodian border clashes., Nikkei Asia
[25] Strangio, S. (2025, December 4). Thailand seizes $300M in assets as scam crackdown deepens. The Diplomat

V. Human, economic and symbolic consequences

The human cost of the Thai-Cambodian conflict is already high and is growing as the clashes escalate. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been forced to abandon their homes and flee to safer areas on both sides of the border as a result of artillery exchanges, gunfire and airstrikes. More than 400,000 people have been evacuated in Thailand**,** while more than 100,000 Cambodians have been displaced, some living in makeshift shelters with limited water, food and sanitation facilities. These massive population movements are creating enormous pressure on local services and health systems, exacerbated by the resumption of fighting in December 2025[26].

The violence has resulted in civilian casualties, with reports of deaths, injuries and destruction of homes, schools and critical infrastructure. Severe restrictions on cross-border movement and village closures have crippled the informal economy, particularly in rural and border areas. Local trade, agriculture and markets that supported these communities have been interrupted, aggravating the precariousness of the already vulnerable populations.

On a broader scale, Thailand is facing the rapid departure of Cambodian migrant workers, who have traditionally been very active in construction, agriculture and fishing. This contraction in the foreign labour force, if prolonged, is likely to lead to shortages in some key sectors and to exert inflationary pressures on production costs. While the figures are still fragmentary, many international media, humanitarian organisations[27] and regional institutions are already highlighting the fragility of these sectors, which are highly dependent on cross-border mobility.

Beyond the human and economic losses, the crisis has revived a particularly sensitive symbolic dimension around cultural heritage. The Cambodian authorities have publicly denounced what they describe as serious attacks on historical sites, particularly around the temple of Ta Krabei, accusing Thailand of endangering a cultural heritage considered inseparable from the Khmer national identity. This emphasis on heritage is not insignificant: it places the conflict in a logic of memory and civilization, where the protection of temples becomes an extension of the political and diplomatic struggle[28].

Beyond its human and economic effects, the conflict has gradually shifted to a symbolic and cultural terrain. Cambodia's withdrawal of its entire delegation from the Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) held in Thailand at the end of 2025 marked a break with the spirit of regional cooperation that these competitions are supposed to embody[29]. In the same vein, the episode surrounding the election of Miss Universe in Thailand offered a revealing illustration of this extension of the conflict to the cultural and media spheres. Virulent exchanges, often tinged with nationalism, have emerged on social networks and in some media, targeting the Cambodian representative in particular. The controversy quickly became so widespread that several sponsors chose to withdraw, placing the organizers in front of a crisis largely unrelated to the very purpose of the contest. This episode shows the extent to which national rivalries are now spreading in spaces that are supposed to remain neutral, transforming an international cultural event into a field of identity and symbolic tensions.

[26] Channel News Asia. (2025, December 18). Thailand–Cambodia conflict forces thousands from homes in border provinces.
[27] Human Rights Watch. (2025, November 25). Cambodia: Returned migrant workers face hunger, joblessness after leaving Thailand due to border conflicts. Human Rights Watch.
[28] Angkor Info. (2025, December 12). A crime against heritage: Cambodia castigates Thailand after a new attack on the temple of Ta Krabei. Angkor Info.
[29] Iau, J. (2025, December 10). Cambodia quits SEA Games in Thailand amid deadly border clashes. South China Morning Post

VI. ASEAN powerless

In the face of this crisis, ASEAN has once again shown the limits of its institutional architecture. So far, the organisation has mainly confined itself to statements of concern and political support for Malaysia-led mediation, without activating a dispute settlement mechanism ahead of the escalation. This restraint is due less to a lack of will than to well-known structural constraints: the principle of non-interference, the search for consensus and the strong political heterogeneity of its members reduce its ability to act when a dispute touches on issues of sovereignty and national security.

Following the July ceasefire, ASEAN's role was limited to the deployment of a temporary military observer mission, which was designed more as a confidence-building instrument than as a real stabilization tool. This reactive, rather than preventive, posture feeds the feeling of an organization confined to the peripheral management of the most serious crises, without any real capacity for imposition or deterrence.

This relative marginalization automatically opens up more space for external powers. In this specific case, China has been able to establish itself as a central mediator, alongside the United States, by mobilizing its economic, political and security levers with both sides. For Beijing, the rapid stabilisation of the Cambodian-Thai front meets a pragmatic imperative: to preserve the continuity of regional corridors and avoid any lasting disruption in the Mekong Valley. For ASEAN, on the other hand, this sequence reinforces the image of an organisation relegated to the background in the management of high-intensity crises, forced to deal with arbitrations that are now largely outsourced.

It should be recalled, however, that ASEAN was never conceived as a collective security alliance with coercive mechanisms comparable to those of NATO or other European organizations. Its architecture is based above all on the prevention, de-escalation and diplomatic management of disputes, in a regional environment marked by strong political heterogeneity and acute sensitivities in terms of sovereignty. The limits observed in the Thai-Cambodian crisis are therefore less a result of a cyclical failure than of the structural constraints inherent in the ASEAN model itself.

In this context, the question of Europe's role is acute. The European Union would not benefit from imposing an exogenous model or setting itself up as a partisan arbiter. Its added value lies more in a posture of facilitation than of injunction. First, it could focus on discreet diplomatic support, encouraging and funding informal channels of dialogue as well as confidence-building initiatives between experts, military officials and civil society actors from both countries. At the same time, the EU has instruments for political dialogue and cooperation to exert targeted pressure for more transparent governance, including in the fight against transnational forms of crime, in particular cyber-fraud networks, which contribute to regional instability. Finally, it would be in Europe's interest to place its action within a regional framework by supporting ASEAN, not by replacing it, but by strengthening its technical capacities in terms of mediation, crisis prevention and ceasefire monitoring, while respecting its leadership and its internal balances.

An endless conflict?

The current fighting between Thailand and Cambodia is neither an accident nor a fatality. They are the contemporary expression of an old rivalry, regularly reactivated when internal political balances weaken. Behind the localized confrontations and nationalist discourses, deeper logics are at work: electoral calculations, threatened grey economies, cross-border networks of interests and, sometimes,

personal score-settling disguised as national causes. The border, in this context, functions less as an issue in itself than as a convenient screen on which crises of legitimacy and governance are projected.

A credible way out of the crisis cannot therefore be limited to a technical agreement on the border or a ceasefire negotiated under international pressure. It presupposes slower and more political work: the ability of the two States to address their internal vulnerabilities, to clean up the grey areas of their border economies and to rebuild trust mechanisms based on shared economic interests rather than on identity one-upmanship. Otherwise, each lull will remain fragile, and each local incident will carry with it the potential for further escalation.

In the medium term, the issue goes beyond the bilateral relationship alone. If these cyclical crises continue, they will contribute to the trivialization of the use of nationalism as a tool of governance in continental Southeast Asia, further weakening regional conflict prevention mechanisms and reinforcing dependence on external mediation. In a context where China is asserting itself as a pragmatic stabilizer and where the United States is now intervening only on an ad hoc basis, the inability of regional actors to settle their differences sets a worrying precedent: that of a Mekong whose security depends on external mediation, to the detriment of autonomous regional mechanisms and a sustainable balance based on cooperation between neighbouring countries.

In the meantime, it is the border populations who continue to pay the price. Forced displacement, loss of income, chronic insecurity: their daily lives are a reminder that the lines drawn on maps have very real consequences on human lives, often far removed from the strategic calculations that defined them.