

Special Article

# The 2025 Thai-Cambodian Conflict Viewed Through Glasl's Nine-Stage Conflict Escalation Model

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## Abstract

This study examines the 2025 Thai-Cambodian border conflict through the lens of Friedrich Glasl's Nine-Stage Conflict Escalation Model, analyzing its progression from simmering tensions to intense military engagement. Triggered by disputes over the Ta Muan Thom temple and escalating into widespread clashes along the Thai-Cambodian border from July 24 to July 28, 2025, the conflict resulted in over 30 deaths and significant civilian displacement. By mapping the conflict's timeline onto Glasl's model, this paper identifies its evolution through rational, emotional, and fighting phases, culminating in a fragile ASEAN-brokered ceasefire on August 7, 2025. The analysis highlights the model's utility in dissecting the dynamics of interstate military conflicts, while also revealing its limitations in capturing historical, geopolitical, and socio-economic factors unique to nation-to-nation disputes. The findings underscore the need for nuanced conflict

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resolution strategies that address underlying territorial and political grievances to prevent future escalations.

**Keywords:** Glasl's Model of Conflict Escalation, Thai-Cambodian Conflict, Geopolitics

## Introduction

After several months of tensions, fighting erupted along the Thai-Cambodian border on July 24, 2025, lasting four days and causing over 30 deaths. The resulting military conflict was triggered by several incidents at Ta Muan Thom temple, which very quickly ignited battles along the Dangrek Mountains within an area called the Emerald Triangle that day. Within two days, fighting had also erupted in the southern tip of the Thai-Cambodian border, where Cambodian troops spilled over into Thai territory in Trat Province. A ceasefire was agreed to by the Cambodian prime minister and acting Thai prime minister in Kuala Lumpur beginning at 2400 hours on July 28, with a 13-point ceasefire agreed to on August 7, 2025.

This latest conflict was much more intense than the fighting around Preah Vihear temple area in 2011. In the first few hours of July 24, Cambodian forces fired both artillery and old Soviet-era BM-21 rockets into Thailand, hitting residential areas and a 7-Eleven at a petrol station at Kantharalak District in Sisaket Province. From a base in Khao Laem Hill Cambodia, artillery hit homes 6 km north of the Chong Chom border town in Thailand later that day.

Cambodian troops attempted to enter into Thai territory on a number of occasions, over the four days. The Thai military responded with artillery fire, and at 11 a.m. dispatched a sortie of 6 F-16s jet fighters from Ubon Ratchatthani air force base to attack Cambodian military bases and other troop positions. On July 26, Cambodian troops entered Thai territory along the Trat province border area near Ban Chamrak in Muang District, not too far away from the Thai Ko Chang tourist areas. This forced Thai naval forces to respond.

The Thai army had amassed convoys of Thai armored personnel carriers and tanks along the Thai-Cambodian border, poised to enter Cambodia, if necessary. Around 140,000 Thai civilians were evacuated to schools, temples, and halls in case more Cambodian rockets were fired into Thai territory. Many Cambodian nationals returned home, as fear grew about Thai resentment of Cambodia (Ratcliffe & Siradapuvadol, 2025).

Major fighting subsided only when the Malaysian government as the chair of ASEAN hosted a ceasefire agreement brokered by the United States and China. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Acting Thai Prime Minister Pheumtham Wechayachai agreed to the ceasefire which commenced at 2400 hours on July 28, 2025.

Tensions have remained tense along the border since, where several alleged breaches of the truce have occurred. The Cambodian defence minister Tea Seila and Thailand's acting defence minister Nattaphon Narkphanit arrived at a 13-point ceasefire agreement. This allowed border observers led by ASEAN member countries deploy along the border on August 7. The ceasefire remained fragile with issues such as the release of prisoners and Thai anger over soldiers injured from landmines laid by the Cambodia military in disputed border areas, which continue to keep pressure on the situation.

This rest of this paper will review the stages of the conflict through the structure of Friedrich Plasl's Nine-Step Model of Conflict Escalation and discuss the merits of the model in analyzing military conflicts.

## **Friedrich Glasl's Nine-Stage Model of Conflict Escalation**

Conflict models have been developed for the purpose of analyzing and determining conflict management strategies for labour and organization disputes. Most have been designed by the organization development practitioners in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

During the 1970s, Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann modified Robert Blake and Jane Mouton's Managerial Grid Model (Blake & Mouton 1964) to create the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Modal (Thomas & Kilmann 1978), which used a grid to determine strategic responses to conflict.

Based on his experiences as both an academic and practitioner, Friedrich Glasl developed a more comprehensive conflict escalation model in the late 1970s, where practitioners could develop a greater understanding of the situational processes of organizational conflict escalation.

Glasl's model was grounded upon the idea that conflicts develop through different stages and can escalate or decline. Glasl believed that conflict could be resolved by taking positive actions. Glasl saw three major phases of a conflict.

First there is the rational phase, a potential win-win situation where the conflict is still under control, and the parties are capable of solving the conflict between themselves. If disagreements cannot be resolved, then the conflict can move into an emotional phase where one party may win and the other lose.

In the emotional phase, the conflict becomes more personal and intense. Instead of looking for solutions, both parties try and win over the other party. They begin to see each other in a

negative light, and seek support from external bodies to support their respective positions. Threats are often made which can lead to the fighting phase where a lose-lose situation may arise.

The fighting phase becomes so intense that both parties suffer harm. The conflict is no longer about winning, but making the other lose, even if it means harming themselves. Thus, actions taken by the parties are aimed at inflicting harm. This stage will require an external person/body to intervene and mediate.

As such, the nine-stage conflict escalation model became a diagnostic tool to assist in the development of interventionalist strategies at the various stages of a conflict through identifying what interventions would be required to dampen escalation of a conflict that may develop a momentum of its own.

Although, Glasl's Conflict Model has extensively been used in organizational conflict resolution, particularly in Europe, knowledge about the use and application of the model for analyzing military conflicts is scarce. Consequently, the model has received limited attention for application in military conflicts.

Glasl's model is being discovered as a tool for nation-to-nation conflicts. A recent article by Samirul Ariff Othman utilized Glasl's Conflict Escalation to contrast the Thai-Cambodian conflict with other conflicts (Othman, 2025).

### **Timeline of Thai-Cambodia Conflict Superimposed onto Glasl's Conflict Model**

Below is a timeline of the Thai-Cambodian conflict superimposed upon Glasl's Nine-Stage Model of Conflict Escalation.

The timeline is mapped out through the three levels. Each stage reflects increasing intensity of the conflict. These include the rational “Win-Win” phase, through stages 1-3, the emotional phase “Win-Lose”, through stages 4-6, and the fighting phase “Lose-Lose” through stages 7-9. In this Thai-Cambodian border conflict, however, it is important to note that some of the stages may overlap due to the quick escalation of the conflict.

The border conflict data has been taken from numerous media and social media reports during the conflict. As such, the impartiality of all reports is unknown. However, this should be balanced out by using multiple media reports from different sources.

### **Level One: The Rational Phase**

Level One, the rational phase consists of three stages where conflicts involve rational discourse, with parties still open for collaboration and mutual gains. These can lead to “win-win” situations through negotiation and mutual agreements.

#### **Stage 1: Hardening Tensions and Crystalized Standpoints**

In stage one, the disagreements between the two parties become clear, increasing the tension of the conflict. Both parties are not sure whether to cooperate with each other and find a solution or ‘dig in’ their positions.

In early 2025 tensions began simmering over historical territorial disputes, particularly around Ta Muan Thom temple. This dispute is rooted in the International Court of Justice (ICJ)’s decision in 1962 awarding Preah Vihear to Cambodia. Both countries fixed positions and Thailand still disputes ICJ jurisdiction, where Cambodia claims an area around the temple. This dispute became clouded in nationalist

sentiments expressed by “public” groups on both sides, which drastically increased tensions. However, no direct confrontations occurred.

Thai soldiers prevented Cambodian groups assembling and singing their national anthem at Ta Muen Thom temple on February 13, heightening friction on both sides. Much of the interchange at that time was both diplomatic and military to military discussions.

### **Stage 2: Debates and Polemics Leading to Emotional Tensions and Polarization**

In this stage both parties move to strengthen their positions. The conflict begins to worsen as opposition between the parties increases. Both parties believe they are right and hold the moral high ground. This continues to increase tensions.

Between March-April 2025, Cambodia increases military posturing, with reports of troop movements and fortifications around Chong Bok and Phnom Prasat Thisou. Thailand responded by building a new road near Prasat Ta Muen Thom to improve access. There was escalating rhetoric about defending sovereignty, which public and social media narratives amplified. Cambodia’s development around Preah Vihear was framed as national development, where the Thais framed this as provocation. Both sides declared their moral credibility.

During April 2025 the contents of a phone call between Cambodian Senate President Hun Sen and Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra was leaked to the public. The call was perceived in Thailand as undermining the actions of the Thai military. The issue was brought to the Constitutional Court by a group of Senators, leading Paetongtarn to step down as prime

minister, subject to a Constitutional Court investigation. Domestic protests against Paetongtarn erupted in Bangkok, calling her a traitor.

### **Stage 3: Words turn into Actions**

In this stage there is a move from verbal communication towards non-verbal provocations and messaging. Any discussions go nowhere and the other party mis-interprets or misunderstands the other party's intentions, thus raising tensions.

On May 28, a skirmish at Ta Muen Thom temple resulted in the death of a Cambodian soldier. Both sides blamed each other, with Cambodia seeking an ICJ ruling. The Thai military reinforced its border positions at the temple. Diplomatic discussions on May 29 and June 5 failed to de-escalate the situation.

During June 2025, Cambodia banned imports of Thai fruits and vegetables, and the Thai authorities cut power and internet services to cross-border areas of Poi Pet. The Cambodians closed their borders, only spasmodically reopening them.

## **Level Two: The Emotional Phase**

Level two, the emotional phase incorporates stages 4-6 where conflicts become a zero-sum game, with one side gaining while the other side loses. These are win-lose situations. Solutions most often require external mediation for resolution.

### **Stage 4: Building Coalitions of Sympathizers and Loss of Neutrality**

This stage moves from any 'win-win' possibilities towards potential 'win-lose' outcomes. Both sides request help and recognition of their positions from third parties. Thinking now becomes 'tribal', perceiving each other as 'us and them'.

During June and July both nations appealed to their citizens for nationalistic support. In addition, both sides sought support from international institutions to endorse their positions and condemn the other party. Cambodia's Hun Sen accused the Thai military leaders of 'greed and ambition' while rallying local nationalist NGOs. Pro-military forces in Thailand protested against Paetongtarn Shinawatra's leadership, demanding a hardline stance towards Cambodia. Thailand accused Cambodia of breaking the United Nations charter in efforts to gain international legitimacy of their position. The social media war stepped up with both sides accusing the other of being the aggressor.

On June 26, 2025, the Thai Constitutional court suspended Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, over her leaked phone call with Hun Sen. Cambodia continued to send weapons, including Soviet BM-21 rockets to the border. Potential military conflict is framed as a moral struggle.

### **Stage 5: Loss of Face, Denigration and Public Attacks**

During this stage the parties openly 'attack' each other and question the other party's integrity and sincerity. Emotions begin to rule over rational thinking, which increases the risk of the conflict taking a on a momentum of its own.

There were two landmine incidents that injured Thai soldiers between July 16-23, 2025. Thailand accused Cambodia of laying new PMN-2 landmines on disputed border land in previously cleared areas. Cambodian attributed the blasts to old mines. Public accusations escalated and became the prime media issues in both countries. Thailand began labelling Cambodia as the provocateur

seeking aggression against Thailand. Cambodia accused Thailand of firing first.

Cambodia launched surveillance drones and Thailand moved F-16 fighter jets to Ubon Ratchathani Airforce Base, ready for immediate use.

### **Stage 6: Threat Strategies, Ultimatums and Power Displays**

In this stage, threats play the major role. Demands are made with promises of punitive measures attached.

Armed conflict began on the morning of July 24 with Cambodia firing Soviet era BM-21 rockets into Sisaket province hitting a gas station in Kantharalak town. Thailand responded with a sortie of F-16s conducting airstrikes on Cambodian positions.

Thailand's Acting Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai warned Cambodia that further action by Cambodia would lead to further Thai military response. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet insisted Cambodia would respond to any Thai military action.

Cambodia had dug trenches up to 300 metres into Thai claimed territory. These positions were supported by heavy artillery. The conflict was poised to enter a 'lose-lose' scenario between the two parties to the conflict.

### **Level Three: Annihilation**

Level three, the fighting phase involved conflicts producing mutual harm and losses. Attacks on one party would lead to retaliation by the other. A lose-lose situation exists.

### **Stage 7: Limited Destructive Blows**

This stage turns to violence where both parties see a need to attack the other and create real damage to the other party. Any damage to the other party is seen as a victory.

Between July 24-27 fighting became direct and intense, resulting in at least 40 deaths on the Thai side. The Cambodian side have not released any official figures, but it is believed to be higher. On the Thai side around 140,000 civilians were evacuated at least 50 km from the border. The land on the Cambodian side is sparsely populated, and evacuation figures are unknown. Rockets and artillery fired from Cambodia into Thailand caused much damage, including killing a civilian and damaging a hospital in Surin province. This caused fear among Thai civilians, especially with the uncontrolled rockets landing deep into Thai territory. F-16 and JAS 39 Gripen jet fighters attacked Cambodian military bases and troop concentrations appeared to be very effective. The Thais allege they captured a number of Cambodian spies on Thai territory directing artillery and rocket firing, and reporting Thai troop movements.

### **Stage 8: Fragments of Annihilation and Targeting Core Systems**

This stage sees the conflict as a matter of ‘all or nothing’ where further escalation becomes possible. One of the parties may lose self-control.

The conflict escalated on July 27 with Cambodian troops crossing over into Trat province, not far from tourist areas, leading to sporadic battles. The Thai military moved tanks and armored personnel carriers close to the border in reserve, and moved troops from other parts of the country into backward positions. The Thai military had to push back Cambodian troops back across the border.

In the last hours of the conflict, the Thai air force focused on destroying “scamming centres” in Cambodia, and attempted to regain strategic positions along the Dangrek Ridge.

Cambodia threatened to deploy their PHL-03 rockets with a 130 km range to target military bases and towns. However, this did not occur, as Saab Gripen fighter jets and a rapid mobile ground force were prepared to enter Cambodia, if necessary.

### **Stage 9: Mutual Annihilation**

In this stage the parties have no option left but to go all out to destroy the other, even if it leads to their own losses.

This stage was not reached as there was a quickly organized ceasefire meeting arranged as the situation on the ground looked like becoming totally out of control. The Cambodians did not launch their longer-range rockets, and the Thai forces were well restrained in their responses. It must be noted that the ceasefire was arranged by external parties, the United States, China, with Malaysia, the ASEAN chair as host. One could speculate that the major factor forcing both parties to ceasefire talks was the US president Trump’s remarks on using the August 1 tariff deadline as leverage if they did not. Both Thailand and Cambodia didn’t want to be stuck with a 36 percent tariff.

Both sides knowing that escalation was getting outside of their control welcomed the intervention of an external party. The ceasefire had been fragile, until a more comprehensive 13-point ceasefire agreement was negotiated in Kuala Lumpur between August 4-7.

One must distinguish between any ceasefire and a long-term peace agreement. A ceasefire agreement doesn’t solve any of the root and underlying causes of the conflict. It only puts a ‘band aid’

over the wound. A long-term peace agreement would come to some mutual agreement concerning the root causes of the conflict and map out a pathway for a lasting peace.

The Thai military claim freshly laid landmines in Thai territory have wounds and maimed a soldier on July 12 at Chong Chub Ta Mok area, while the Cambodians deny any mines were ever laid within Thai territory. Once again, the dispute goes back to Stage 4, where the Thai authorities are lodging formal complaints to the Secretary-general of the Ottawa Convention and Secretary-general of the United Nations and preparing countermeasures against the Cambodians.

There are still reports of local civilians in the Preah Vihear border area re-evacuating out of fears that further fighting may break out. Hundreds of thousands of Cambodian guest workers in Thailand are returning home after being summoned back by the Government. This appears to be an attempt of economic sabotage by Cambodia, as Cambodian workers have been vital in the farming, manufacturing, and construction industries.

### **The weaknesses of the Glasl Conflict Escalation Model**

Such models used by outsiders to any conflict may miss data and not pick up underlying factors that may create some meaning about long simmering micro-escalations. This is a weakness of Glasl's model, when long-term historical factors exist that draw both parties to the same geographic area with a different narrative. Below is a list of factors the Glasl model does not take into account in nation-to-nation conflict escalation.

## 1. Root Underlying and Causal Factors

The historical issues are often mentioned as an underlying causal factor. Along the border there is definitely an inherent source of conflict between the cultural heritage issues and a conflicting natural border, as witnessed by the cliff faces along the Dangrek mountains. Past maps defining the border have been ambiguous in defining border demarcations. Artifacts from the ancient Khmer civilization lie atop the cliffs, indicating the former extent of the Khmer Empire within what is now Cambodian territory. This is supported by old colonial maps that have created ambiguity.

This factor has hindered the opportunity for countries to jointly developing tourism along the border, as existed at Preah Vihear before the previous Thai-Cambodian conflict between 2008-2011. There is little doubt that joint access to Ta Muen Thom temple will also cease after this latest conflict.

On the border demarcation issue, both Thailand and Cambodia have their own firm beliefs as to where the border demarcations should actually be. This area of difference is likely to cause continuous friction on the ground between Thai and Cambodian military (Khaosod English, 2025) for a long time to come, even after the ceasefire is firmly in place.

One cannot discount the ‘international family feud’ between the Shinawatra and Hun Sen, which became known to the public at large after Hun Sen leaked a telephone conversation between himself and Paetongtarn Shinawatra. As Thai political commentator Ken Lohatepanont said, no one knows about any of the underlying issues that led to the collapse of the relationship, and what it meant in terms of the conflict (Lohatepanont, 2025).

There has been a concerted effort by Thai military authorities to cripple scam operations and money laundering activities on the Cambodian side of the border. These activities have been centered around Poi Pet border, where Thai authorities cut hidden underground electricity and communications cables with Thailand. There is some conjecture about who actually owns these illegal operations. Some reports say members of the Thai political establishment, while others say the Cambodian establishment. One news report links the scamming facilities in Poi Pet with Kok An, a Cambodian senator, reportedly close to Hun Sen, wanted by the Thai police (Thai PBS, 2025).

The Thai military may have used the opportunity to eliminate “scam enterprises” along the border region, which may have influenced Cambodian responses.

Perhaps the most fitting explanation of the underlying causes of the conflict was best described by CAN’s Nirmal Ghosh who wrote “any definitive explanation without real evidence is suspect; the origins of the conflict remain opaque and likely only really known to a relatively small circle of power elites in both capitals” (Ghosh 2025).

## **2. Geographic Factors**

The Thai-Cambodia border stretches 817 kilometres from the Emerald Triangle to the coast at Trat. The border is ill-defined along many locations, where pockets of Khmer heritage stand inside, what could be called a ‘natural border’. Most of the border is covered with dense forest, and a long ridge along the sandstone Dangrek mountains, which defines the edge of the Isaan Plateau. The border runs south through forested mountains along Chanthaburi province and Trat province to the sea. Much of this

border is un-marked and subject to poor demarcation based upon old colonial maps.

Thailand has a massive natural military advantage along the Dangrek Ridge, where the drop is as much as 500 feet in some places, naturally protecting Thailand from Cambodian attack with ground forces. It's only in some places like Poi Pet, Ta Muen Thom, Chong Chom, and Preah Vihear, where there are roads down to the Cambodian plain. The 10<sup>th</sup> Century Ta Muen Thom temple was jointly patrolled by Thai and Cambodian military right up to July 24.

To the south along Chanthaburi and Trat Provinces lie the Cardamoms Ranges which are fully demarcated with the Ban Laem, Pong Nam Ron, Ban Pakkad, Had Lek and Ban Sattari border checkpoints.

### **3. Relative Military Strength**

A major factor in any conflict is the relative military strength of each party. This can be a major factor in any escalation of conflict. In the case of Thailand and Cambodia, Thailand clearly has a military advantage over Cambodia. According to Global Firepower, Thailand was ranked 25th and Cambodia 95th out of 145 countries. Thailand would most likely overpower Cambodia in an all-out war due to larger and relatively more modern forces. Cambodia's military equipment is relatively outdated.

This factor did not play a major role in the recent conflict, except where outdated Cambodian BM-21 rockets caused civilian casualties, which could have caused escalation of the conflict by the Thai military forces, should they had chosen to do so.

### **4. Political Issues**

A recent NIDA poll taken in early August revealed that most Thais trust the military more than the civilian government to solve

the border dispute (Bank Finance, 2025). This was perhaps one of Hun Sen’s objectives, to destabilize the Thai government, although this is just speculation.

However, Cambodian opposition leader Sam Rainsy in a FB post sees the motive of Hun Sen was to protect his shadow economy of “Scam centres” along the Thai-Cambodian border. Sam Rainsy sees criminal networks rather than patriarchy as the source of Hun Sen’s power in Cambodia. Thus, from this perspective, the conflict from the Cambodian side was about protecting these criminal networks. Thaksin Shinawatra’s attack on these networks in June was perceived as a direct threat to Hun Sen. This can partly explain why Hun Sen in Trat invaded Thai territory in an attempt to damage the reputation of Thai tourism safety.

Hun Sen’s media apparatus reframed Thai border enforcement actions as nationalist provocation against Cambodia, masking the real stakes of the conflict, the financial survival of the Hun Sen regime (Rainsy, 2025).

An Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) review of the conflict reported that Cambodia had mobilized troops and heavy weapons, including BM-21 rocket artillery and 30 Soviet era tanks towards the Emerald Triangle between March and May 2025. Cambodian forces built trenches up to 300 metres into Thai territory at the Damnak Tuk Chom outpost according to satellite data (Suriyasenee & Ruser, 2025).

The Thai military only appeared to act only in direct response to initiated Cambodian attacks. This was according to publicly available evidence in a measured manner. However, this does not mean the Thais were not ready to escalate into stage 9 if necessary.

There are little doubt Thai troops would have moved into Cambodia to create a buffer to protect civilians against rocket attacks if they had continued to threaten civilians. The Thai public was ready for this with around the clock media coverage of Thai civilian casualties from Cambodia at the time. This did not occur as Cambodian rocket attacks after the first day declined sharply, as the Cambodians were most likely aware of the Thai military build-up on the border.

### **5. Command and Control**

There was doubt whether any diplomatic activities and initiatives would have been affective at this early stage of the conflict due to separation of command and control from the civilian heads of government and the military.

Both the Cambodian and Thai civilian governments had little direct control of the situation. Consequently, there was a civilian absence in the border dispute as decisions and operations are in the hands of the military.

On the Cambodian side, all military action is under the direction of the Senate President Hun Sen who has created a war room in his office. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet who is Hun Sen's son had stayed out of the issue.

On the Thai side, all military activities were under the direct control of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army commander Lt. General Boonsin Padklang. The civilian Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has restricted herself to making comments from Bangkok. Acting Thai Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai was also silent, only participating in the ceasefire agreement in Kuala Lumpur.

## **6. External Influences**

Now that there is a ceasefire, it will the ASEAN border monitors as a neutral party, which may play a major role in maintaining peace between Thai and Cambodian forces. The key to any lasting peace would be a demilitarization of the Thai-Cambodian border in a similar manner to the Thai-Malaysia and Thai-Lao border areas. Borders would once again be run by the civilian authorities of both nations, which still have not come back to man border checkpoints that still remain closed at the time of writing.

## **7. Consequences of Conflict**

The Thai-Cambodian conflict had turned into a Thai domestic political crisis. Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has been suspended while the Constitutional Court investigates the phone call between Paetongtarn and Hun Sen. Relations between Paetongtarn and the military have been strained. The Shinawatras are now politically isolated.

Coming events could lead to the fall of the Pheu Thai led government over the next few months. Once again, the intention and objectives of Hun Sen can only be speculative, although the conflict has contributed to the political woes of the Shinawatra family.

Returning Cambodian workers to their homes is going to affect Thai businesses in the short-term, but may have long-term unemployment issues in Cambodia. Approximately 400,000 Cambodian workers have returned home since the conflict began and have not returned, leaving Thailand with a labour shortage. Likewise cross-border trade and tourism have been affected, particularly in Trat. According to the Observer of Economic Complexity (OEC), annual Thai-Cambodian border trade was

estimated at USD 8 billion per annum. It's uncertain how long-term these effects will last.

Tourism between Thailand and Cambodia along the border is temporarily finished. Hotels and businesses in Aranyaprathet are feeling the stop of tourism and transit business across the border. The only way to travel between Cambodia and Thailand is by plane from cities like Bangkok and Siem Reap.

On the Cambodian side, one must look past the social media propaganda to see the consequences of the conflict. Both Hun Sen and Hun Manet appear politically strong and popular after conflict. With Cambodia's RSF Press Freedom ranking at 161 out of 181 countries, one must be cautious in making conclusions from media reports (RSF, n.d.). While there appears to be overwhelming support for Hun Sen in the media, discussions with Cambodian nationals in Thailand indicate otherwise.

The Southeast Asian Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (SEAProTI) concluded that the media on both sides of the conflict not only reported events but made meaning with psychological warfare and information warfare strategies, thus themselves became instruments of the conflict (Sumanat, 2025).

## **Discussion**

Friedrich Glasl's Nine-Stage Conflict Escalation Model is a robust framework for analyzing conflict dynamics, particularly in organizational settings, but its application to interstate military conflicts, such as the 2025 Thai-Cambodian border conflict, reveals several limitations. These limitations in detail, focusing on how they manifest in the context of nation-to-nation disputes. The analysis is

structured around key areas where the model falls short, ensuring a comprehensive yet concise evaluation.

### 1. Limited Consideration of Historical and Cultural Context

**Issue:** Glasl's model is designed primarily for organizational conflicts, where disputes typically lack the deep historical and cultural roots often present in interstate conflicts. The model assumes conflicts escalate in a linear fashion through stages driven by immediate actions and reactions, but it does not adequately account for long-standing historical grievances or cultural narratives that shape nation-to-nation disputes.

**Thai-Cambodian Context:** The article highlights the historical territorial disputes rooted in the 1962 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on Preah Vihear and ambiguities in colonial-era maps, which fuelled nationalist sentiments and tensions around Ta Muan Thom temple. These underlying factors, simmering for decades, created a predisposition for conflict that Glasl's model does not explicitly address. The model's focus on immediate escalation stages overlooks how historical narratives, such as competing claims over Khmer heritage sites, drive "micro-escalations" that predate Stage 1 (Hardening Tensions).

**Implication:** Without integrating historical context, the model risks misinterpreting the root causes of conflict, limiting its diagnostic depth for interstate disputes where history and culture are central drivers.

### 2. Inadequate Handling of Geopolitical and External Influences

**Issue:** Glasl's model focuses on the internal dynamics between conflicting parties, with external intervention primarily considered in later stages (e.g., mediation in the fighting phase). It

does not account for the significant role of other actors, or external pressures that shape nation-to-nation conflicts from the outset.

**Thai-Cambodian Context:** Malaysia, the United States, and China played a significant role in brokering the ceasefire, with U.S. President Trump's tariff threats reportedly influencing both parties' decisions. Additionally, the involvement of ASEAN border monitors post-ceasefire highlights the ongoing influence of external entities. Glasl's model does not provide a framework for analyzing how such external pressures affect escalation or de-escalation at various stages, particularly in the rational and emotional phases.

**Implication:** The model's limited focus on external actors underestimates their impact on conflict trajectories, especially in interstate disputes where global powers and regional organizations often play pivotal roles.

### 3. Neglect of Political Factors

**Issue:** Glasl's model emphasizes psychological and behavioral escalation (e.g., hardening positions, loss of face) but does not sufficiently incorporate socio-economic or political factors that can drive or sustain conflicts. In nation-to-nation conflicts, issues like economic interests, domestic political instability, or criminal networks can be central to escalation.

**Thai-Cambodian Context:** Political drivers, such as Cambodia's alleged protection of "scam centers" in Poi Pet, linked to figures like Senator Kok An, and the economic impact of 400,000 Cambodian workers returning home, disrupting Thai industries. Additionally, the domestic political crisis in Thailand, including the suspension of Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and tensions between the Shinawatra family and the military, exacerbated the

conflict. Glasl's model does not account for these complex political and economic motivations, such as Hun Sen's potential aim to destabilize Thailand's government or protect shadow economies.

**Implication:** By focusing on interpersonal or group dynamics, the model misses critical structural factors that can sustain or escalate interstate conflicts, limiting its applicability to disputes with multifaceted socio-political dimensions.

#### 4. Assumption of Linear Escalation

**Issue:** Glasl's model assumes a sequential progression through nine stages, across three level implying a relatively predictable escalation path. However, nation-to-nation military conflicts often involve rapid, non-linear escalation or overlapping stages due to the intensity of military actions and the involvement of multiple actors, as was seen within this conflict.

**Thai-Cambodian Context:** The article notes that some stages of the conflict overlapped due to its rapid escalation, with the conflict moving from Stage 1 (Hardening Tensions) to Stage 7 (Limited Destructive Blows) within months, driven by incidents like the Cambodian soldier's death and rocket attacks. The model's linear structure struggles to capture such accelerated or concurrent escalation, particularly when military actions (e.g., F-16 airstrikes, rocket barrages) create immediate jumps to higher stages.

**Implication:** The model's linear framework may oversimplify the chaotic and multifaceted nature of military conflicts, reducing its ability to reflect real-time dynamics accurately.

#### 5. Limited Applicability to Military Dynamics

**Issue:** Glasl's model was developed for organizational settings, where conflicts typically involve non-violent disputes (e.g., labor

disagreements). It is less equipped to handle the unique dynamics of military conflicts, such as the role of relative military strength, command-and-control structures, or the strategic use of violence.

**Thai-Cambodian Context:** Thailand's military advantage (ranked 25<sup>th</sup> globally vs. Cambodia's 95<sup>th</sup>) and the role of military command structures (e.g., Thailand's 2<sup>nd</sup> Army commander Lt. General Boonsin Padklang and Cambodia's Senate President Hun Sen directing operations). Glasl's model does not account for how military capabilities, such as Thailand's F-16s and JAS 39 Gripens or Cambodia's outdated BM-21 rockets, influence escalation decisions. Nor does it address the separation of civilian and military control, which limited diplomatic de-escalation efforts in the early stages.

**Implication:** The model's focus on psychological and social dynamics overlooks the strategic and logistical aspects of military conflicts, reducing its utility for analyzing wars or border disputes.

## 6. Data Sensitivity and Bias in Application

**Issue:** Glasl's model relies on accurate data to map conflict stages, but in nation-to-nation conflicts, data is often incomplete, biased, or influenced by propaganda, making it challenging to apply the model objectively.

**Thai-Cambodian Context:** The fact that conflict data was drawn from media and social media reports, with unknown impartiality may bias the analysis. Both sides engaged in psychological and information warfare, with Cambodia framing Thai actions as nationalist provocation and Thailand accusing Cambodia of aggression. Glasl's model does not provide tools to navigate such biased or incomplete information, which can distort stage identification (e.g., whether landmine incidents were new or old).

**Implication:** The model's reliance on clear, objective data limits its effectiveness in conflicts where media manipulation and propaganda obscure the true progression of events.

## 7. Focus on Escalation Over De-escalation

**Issue:** Glasl's model is primarily a diagnostic tool for understanding escalation, with less emphasis on de-escalation strategies or the sustainability of resolutions like ceasefires. In nation-to-nation conflicts, where ceasefires are often fragile, this focus limits the model's practical utility for long-term peacebuilding.

**Thai-Cambodian Context:** The fragility of the August 7, 2025, ceasefire, with ongoing issues like landmine disputes and civilian evacuations indicating a return to Stage 4 (Building Coalitions). Glasl's model does not provide a clear framework for analyzing post-conflict dynamics or the steps needed to achieve a lasting peace agreement, as opposed to a temporary ceasefire.

**Implication:** The model's emphasis on escalation stages leaves gaps in addressing how to sustain de-escalation or resolve underlying issues, critical for preventing conflict recurrence in interstate disputes.

## Conclusion

While Glasl's Nine-Stage Conflict Escalation Model offers a valuable framework for mapping the progression of the 2025 Thai-Cambodian conflict, its limitations are evident in its application to interstate military disputes. The model struggles to account for historical and cultural roots, contextual influences, political drivers, non-linear escalation, military dynamics, data biases, and post-conflict de-escalation.

These shortcomings suggest that while Glasl's model can provide a structured analysis of conflict stages, it requires supplementation with context-specific frameworks that address the unique complexities of nation-to-nation conflicts. For future applications, integrating historical analysis, geopolitical considerations, and socio-economic factors could enhance the model's utility in analyzing and managing interstate disputes.

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