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ASEAN's Ineffectiveness in Handling Intra-Regional Conflicts Thailand and Cambodia

Saffiya Hisaan Irhamna Pranowo, Sofia Hana Zahra Kuswijayanti, Tiara Tahta Anindhita, Gregorius Alessandro Bria Nahak, & Muhnizar Siagian

Saffiya Hisaan Irhamna Pranowo
Affiliation : Universitas Sebelas Maret
City : Surakarta
Country : Indonesia
Email : saffiyahisaan@gmail.com

Sofia Hana Zahra Kuswijayanti
Affiliation : Universitas Sebelas Maret
City : Surakarta
Country : Indonesia
Email : sofiahanazk@gmail.com

Tiara Tahta Anindhita
Affiliation : Universitas Sebelas Maret
City : Surakarta
Country : Indonesia
Email : anindhitatahta@gmail.com

Gregorius Alessandro Bria Nahak
Affiliation : Universitas Sebelas Maret
City : Surakarta
Country : Indonesia
Email : gorisbrianahak11@gmail.com

Muhnizar Siagian
Affiliation : Universitas Sebelas Maret
City : Surakarta
Country : Indonesia
Email : muhnizar.siagian@staff.uns.ac.id

Abstract

The armed conflict between Thailand and Cambodia that escalated into bloodshed in 2025 has renewed critical evaluation of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) as a regional organization oriented toward peace and collective stability. The current escalation, marked by armed clashes, border closures, and the severance of economic cooperation, is closely tied to a longstanding dispute over the 1907 French colonial demarcation line and the sovereignty of the Preah Vihear Temple, exposing the limits of ASEAN's Non Interference Principle, which prioritizes member state sovereignty over collective enforcement. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, following Creswell's framework, to analyze the conflict as a complex, context bound phenomenon, drawing on documentary sources such as ICJ rulings, government and ASEAN statements, academic literature, and media reports, analyzed inductively through the lens of regionalism theory, distinguishing between negative peace (cessation of violence) and positive peace (resolution of root causes). The findings show that ASEAN's normative instruments, particularly the ASEAN Way and consensus based decision making, function primarily as a dialogue facilitator

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rather than a binding conflict resolver. ASEAN succeeded in producing temporary ceasefires that constitute negative peace but failed to address the structural roots of the dispute, leaving Cambodia to seek recourse through the International Court of Justice, while domestic political factors, particularly nationalism in both states, consistently outweighed regional commitments. This case illustrates a structural gap between ASEAN's normative aspiration toward positive peace and its practical capacity for enforcement, underscoring the need for stronger institutional and legally binding mechanisms within regionalism to manage future intra regional conflicts.

Key Words: ASEAN, Regionalism, Conflict, Thailand, Cambodia

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INTRODUCTION

The Thailand–Cambodia conflict demonstrates a fundamental problem in ASEAN regionalism: the existence of regional institutions and commitments to peaceful dispute settlement does not necessarily translate into the capacity to prevent the recurrence of conflict or resolve its underlying causes. As a regional organization, ASEAN promotes peace, stability, consultation, and cooperation among member states. However, these objectives operate within the ASEAN Way, which places strong emphasis on respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and consensus. Therefore, ASEAN's ability to respond to intra-regional conflict depends substantially on the willingness of the states involved to cooperate with regional mechanisms (Farida, 2014, pp. 59–61; Tekunan, 2014).

The problem becomes apparent when this institutional arrangement is examined against the recurrence of the Thailand–Cambodia conflict. ASEAN has provided diplomatic and dialogue mechanisms to manage the dispute, but its involvement has been characterized as more facilitative than resolutive, while national interests have repeatedly outweighed collective regional commitments (Nisa, 2016; Pottu & Siahaan, 2021, pp. 213–215). The conflict's recurrence across the 2008–2013 period and its renewed escalation in 2025 indicates that the regional mechanisms have been more successful in containing immediate tensions than in addressing the territorial and political grievances that sustain the dispute. Thus, the central problem is not simply that ASEAN is unable to stop every escalation, but that its existing regional mechanisms have limited capacity to transform temporary conflict management into a durable resolution.

This limitation creates a gap between ASEAN's normative objective of maintaining regional peace and its practical capacity to produce sustainable peace. ASEAN can facilitate negotiations, mediation, and ceasefires, but these measures do not necessarily resolve the structural causes of the Thailand–Cambodia dispute. As a result, ASEAN's intervention may produce negative peace by reducing or temporarily stopping violence, while the conditions necessary for positive peace remain unresolved. The recurrence of the dispute therefore raises a critical question about whether ASEAN's model of regional cooperation is sufficiently equipped to manage intra-regional conflicts whose parties continue to prioritize sovereignty and national interests.

Several factors hinder ASEAN from addressing this problem. First, the principle of non-interference restricts ASEAN from intervening decisively in disputes involving the sovereignty of its member states. Second, consensus-based decision-making makes collective action dependent on the political agreement of the states concerned. Third, ASEAN lacks strong coercive mechanisms to ensure compliance when member states reject or do not implement regional initiatives (Farida, 2014, pp. 59–61; Nisa, 2016, pp. 8–9). These institutional constraints are reinforced by domestic political considerations and nationalism in Thailand and Cambodia, which can make national sovereignty more politically important than regional commitments (Pottu & Siahaan, 2021, pp. 213–215). Consequently, ASEAN's

capacity to resolve the conflict is constrained not only by the design of its regional mechanisms, but also by the willingness of member states to subordinate immediate national interests to collective regional objectives.

Based on this problem, this study critically examines why ASEAN has been unable to reduce the Thailand–Cambodia conflict in a sustainable manner. The analysis focuses on two interconnected questions: what consequences arise from ASEAN's limited capacity to prevent and resolve the conflict, and what institutional and political factors hinder ASEAN from achieving a more durable resolution? By addressing these questions through a regionalism perspective, this study seeks to explain the gap between ASEAN's normative commitment to regional peace and its practical effectiveness in managing the Thailand–Cambodia conflict.

Previous studies have examined the Thailand–Cambodia conflict from several perspectives. ASEAN's institutional limitations resulting from the principle of non-interference have been highlighted in previous studies, while its diplomatic role has been characterized as facilitating dialogue rather than enforcing conflict resolution (Farida, 2014; Pottu & Siahaan, 2021). More recent studies have discussed the renewed escalation of the Thailand–Cambodia conflict in 2025 and the continuing relevance of the ASEAN Way in addressing contemporary regional challenges (Hafizh & Wiswayana, 2025; Tarigan, 2025). However, these studies primarily examine ASEAN's diplomatic mechanisms or the conflict separately. They have not sufficiently analyzed how the renewed 2025 conflict exposes the gap between the normative ideals of regionalism and ASEAN's actual institutional effectiveness. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by integrating the latest conflict developments with a regionalism perspective to critically evaluate ASEAN's effectiveness in handling intra-regional conflicts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liberal Institutionalism and Regional Security Cooperation

Ramli and Idris (2022, pp. 83–84) apply the Liberal Institutionalist approach to explain ASEAN security cooperation, arguing that regional institutions can reduce the likelihood of conflict by fostering interdependence and shared norms, even in the absence of supranational enforcement authority. Within the Liberal Institutionalist framework, Keohane (2012) describes ASEAN's function as an international institution that facilitates mutually beneficial cooperation in regional security through control mechanisms—preventing regression while serving as an antidote to fatalism and a source of hope. This perspective helps explain why ASEAN member states continue to engage in dialogue mechanisms despite the absence of coercive power. Cooperation is sustained by shared interests rather than legal obligations—a dynamic evident in ASEAN's shuttle diplomacy during the Preah Vihear crisis.

Regionalism and the Asean Way Concept

Regionalism, serving as the theoretical lens for this study, refers to a state-driven, institutionalized cooperation process aimed at managing collective interests while preserving national sovereignty. Within ASEAN, regionalism refers to the process of integration and cooperation among Southeast Asian nations, established to maintain peace, stability, and shared prosperity. The logic of this cooperation is operationalized through what scholars term the "ASEAN Way"—a consensus-oriented, informal mode of interaction that prioritizes dialogue over coercion (Tekunan, 2014). Non-interference and consensus are the core constitutive principles of the ASEAN Way, codified in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.

The principle of non-interference serves as a fundamental constraint in discussions regarding inter-state dialogue and consensus; it affirms the sovereign equality of member states and restricts the organization from intervening in matters deemed domestic or bilateral affairs. Farida (2014, pp. 59–61) argues that while this principle enables ASEAN to provide a diplomatic platform, it simultaneously limits the organization's ability to enforce binding resolutions, rendering its interventions largely persuasive rather than decisive. These structural constraints form the conceptual basis for evaluating ASEAN's role in the Thai-Cambodian dispute. In this context, the function of the consensus principle is called into question, appearing less about genuine deliberation and more about avoiding sensitive domestic issues. Reflecting on these interdependent yet asymmetrical principles, Tan (2017) argues that despite decades of institutional development, ASEAN's conflict management practices have not evolved significantly beyond this informal, non-binding character, even as intra-regional disputes have grown increasingly complex.

The Non Interference Principle

Central to the ASEAN Way is the Non Interference Principle, which affirms the sovereign equality of member states and restrains the organization from intervening in what are considered domestic or bilateral matter. Farida (2014, pp. 59 to 61) contends that while this principle enables ASEAN to provide a platform for diplomacy, it simultaneously limits the organization;s capacity to enforce binding resolutions, rendering its interventions largely persuasive rather than decisive. This structural constraint forms the conceptual basis for evaluating ASEAN's role in the Thailand Cambodia dispute.

Prior Studies on the Thailand Cambodia Conflict

A body of prior research has examined ASEAN's role in the Preah Vihear dispute specifically. Nisa (2016, pp. 8 to 9) frames ASEAN's involvement as facilitative rather that resolutive, documenting Indonesia's shuttle diplomacy as an example of peacemaking without enforcement. Pottu and Siahaan (2021, pp. 213 to 215) similarly emphasize that national interests consistently outweighed collective regional commitments throughout the negotiation process. Raharjo (2013, p.4) situates the conflict as a direct threat to ASEAN's regional cohesion, while Tjandra (2016, pp. 8 to 9) concludes that ASEAN has not yet fulfilled the community building aspirations embedded in regionalist theory. From a different theoretical

angle, Ulya (2021, pp. 11 to 12) analyzes the same conflict through a neoliberalist perspective, reinforcing the observation that institutional cooperation persists even where enforcement is weak. More recently, Setyowati and Nurulita (2023) revisit ASEAN's dispute resolution role considering evolving legal mechanisms, providing a bridge between earlier assessments and the renewed 2025 escalation analyzed in this study.

Synthesis

Taken together, this literature establishes that ASEAN's regionalism operates predominantly at the level of negative peace, preventing escalation without resolving underlying grievances, a pattern consistent across the 2008 to 2013 and 2025 phases of the Thailand Cambodia conflict. This study builds on these findings by integrating them with the 2025 escalation to assess whether ASEAN's institutional character has evolved.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study approach formulated by John W. Creswell to understand the Thailand-Cambodia conflict as a complex, context-bound phenomenon. According to Creswell (2014) in Sumbodo et al (2024, p. 63), a case study requires a holistic and natural understanding of the dynamics of events by integrating various data such as historical documents, diplomatic reports, media reports, and academic literature, thus enabling researchers to see the relationship between historical factors, domestic politics, and regional dynamics. This approach is carried out inductively, namely, observing specific cases first before linking them to certain theories. The research focuses on the territorial dispute over the Preah Vihear Temple, the military clashes that occurred between 2008 and 2025, and the political dynamics in both countries that exacerbated the conflict. In addition, this study examines the extent to which the dispute-resolution mechanisms offered by ASEAN and the decisions of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) are implemented in practice. The theoretical perspective used is regionalism, but not to demonstrate its success, but rather to demonstrate the failure of the regionalist perspective in preventing conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. Therefore, this study identifies empirical patterns that show that domestic factors and nationalism play a far more crucial role than the international cooperation mechanisms idealized by regionalism. It is important to note that regionalism encompasses cooperation to foster developmental forces and achieve a higher level of economic development. Therefore, state contributions are also important in fostering cooperation. However, regionalism also prioritizes strengthening individual interests over establishing equal multilateral relationships, potentially leading to control and domination over others.

This study uses qualitative data from documentary sources, including ICJ decisions, government statements, ASEAN statements, academic literature, research institute reports, and media coverage, to construct a chronology and analyze events. Data collection techniques included reviewing literature, documents, and news sources

for details on military escalation, public reactions, and the diplomatic steps of the two countries. Data analysis used an inductive analysis method, namely organizing data into categories such as international legal disputes, the role of regional institutions, domestic political influence, and military escalation. Data validity was strengthened through data triangulation, member checking, and negative case analysis. This study also has weaknesses, such as reliance on secondary data, the absence of field interviews, and the ongoing nature of the conflict, which makes the analysis subject to change and development. However, Creswell's case study allows this research to produce a comprehensive, in-depth, and critical understanding of the failure of regionalism to explain the Thailand-Cambodia conflict, and how domestic political dynamics and nationalism are the primary determinants of the behavior of both countries.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conflict between Thailand and Cambodia

The war between Thailand and Cambodia was sparked by a border dispute. The border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand dates back to 1907, when a demarcation line was established during the French colonial era. Cambodia used this line as the basis for its territorial claims, while Thailand considered the boundary inaccurate. The most disputed area was the Preah Vihear Temple complex, a historical site dating back over 1,000 years. Numerous misunderstandings arose between the two sides. This was followed by a 1962 decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that legitimized Cambodia's claim to the site. The Court reaffirmed Cambodia's legitimacy after a 2011 armed confrontation around the site. Therefore, in 2013, the Court affirmed Cambodia's sovereignty over Preah Vihear Temple and the surrounding area (UN News, 2013).

The Thailand-Cambodia tensions in early 2025 demonstrated the fragility of the Mekong region's stability and tested ASEAN's commitment to regionalism, which emphasizes non-violence, cooperation, and the peaceful resolution of disputes, as outlined in the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. The nationalist demonstrations at Ta Moan Thom Temple, the armed clashes in the Emerald Triangle that killed one Cambodian soldier, and Phnom Penh's restrictions on electricity, internet, and Thai imports all highlighted the risk of escalation in a densely populated region and an economic sector that would lead to a decline in trade between Thailand and Cambodia, which previously reached billions of dollars annually. The diplomatic failure in Phnom Penh highlights the need for more effective regional mechanisms, including ASEAN mediation, strengthening confidence-building measures, and a commitment to maintaining borders as a space for regional stability, not an arena for confrontation (International Crisis Group, 2011).

Thailand–Cambodia tensions continue. Tensions escalated throughout June and July 2025 through a series of interconnected events. On June 15, Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra held direct talks with former Cambodian leader

Hun Sen in an attempt to defuse the situation. However, the dialogue failed, and the political tensions escalated. Two weeks later, on June 26, Thailand retaliated by cutting off internet access to Cambodia. This demonstrated the growing tension and the escalating conflict, fueled by a desire for dominance.

Furthermore, the situation in Thailand escalated after July 1, particularly after Shinawatra was temporarily suspended following the leak of a recording of her private conversation with Hun Sen. The leak exposed internal tensions between the Thai civilian government and the military, sparking a wave of domestic protests. This also affected Thailand's foreign policy towards Cambodia (Ratcliffe, 2025). Tensions on the ground escalated again on July 16. In the Chong Bok area of Ubon Ratchathani, a Thai soldier lost his leg in a landmine explosion. This incident not only demonstrated the escalation of the armed conflict but also demonstrated that the border region had become a dangerous space with real humanitarian risks. This series of events demonstrated that the Thailand-Cambodia conflict was no longer a one-dimensional one. Instead, it was catalyzing tensions that could have a detrimental impact on regional stability.

On July 23, tensions continued, marked by an explosion in the Nam Yuen area of Ubon Ratchathani, which injured five soldiers. In response, Thailand withdrew its ambassador from Cambodia and closed several border posts, including Chong An Ma, Chong Sa-ngam, Chong Chom, and Chong Sai Takoo, and suspended the operations of the Ta Moan Thom and Ta Kwai temples. Then, the conflict peaked on July 24, which triggered air and ground attacks that caused extensive damage, leading Cambodia to withdraw its diplomatic staff from Thailand. To date, the conflict has killed at least 16 people from both sides, consisting of 14 civilians and one Thai soldier, and one Cambodian civilian. This incident marked the continuation of the most serious escalation in Thai-Cambodian relations in the last decade.

In addition to impacting diplomatic relations, this conflict also had significant social and economic consequences. At the peak of tensions in July 2025, thousands of residents along the border were forced to flee amid escalating fighting (Rateliffe, 2025). Numerous power outages and the closure of emergency posts further reduced community interaction and mutual assistance. Furthermore, the continued erosion of aid supplies exacerbated the community's suffering, leading to a decline in economic activity. This situation demonstrates that the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia has expanded from a mere territorial dispute to a multidimensional issue involving security, political, and humanitarian aspects. Therefore, the steps taken to resolve this complex issue are not easy. Many consequences must be faced in order to resolve this complex issue.

Analysis of ASEAN Effectiveness in Perspective Regionalism

Liberal institutionalism structures international relations between states in a simplified form. Liberal organizations are expected to facilitate non-coercive conflict resolution through peaceful approaches—such as providing platforms for communication and transparency, establishing rules or norms based on member

consensus, and reducing the costs of diplomatic transactions. According to Ramli and Idris (2022, pp. 83–84), ASEAN is founded on agreements and norms that enable dialogue regarding conflicts among its members. The Thailand-Cambodia dispute over the Preah Vihear Temple territory demonstrates the practical application of values enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)—specifically the prioritization of dialogue, negotiation, and mediation (Hafizh & Wiswayana, 2025, p. 309). Within the framework of Southeast Asian regionalism, liberal institutionalism serves as the foundation for the association's approach to sustaining cooperation.

Regionalism refers to the process through which geographically proximate states establish institutionalized cooperation to maintain regional stability, promote collective security, and manage common political, economic, and social challenges. It emphasizes the creation of cooperative regional institutions that enable member states to achieve peace through collective action rather than unilateral policies (Ramli & Idris, 2022). Within the ASEAN context, regionalism is characterized by the ASEAN Way, which prioritizes consultation, consensus, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and respect for state sovereignty (Tekunan, 2014). Therefore, ASEAN's effectiveness from a regionalism perspective can be evaluated by examining whether its institutional mechanisms are capable of transforming regional cooperation into sustainable peace and effective conflict resolution.

Its normative framework—such as the "ASEAN Way"—is often constrained by the dominance of national interests, which limits the organization's ability to formulate decisive and concrete policies. Guided by principles of non-interference and consensus, ASEAN functions primarily as a stabilizing force; its strength lies not in the capacity to impose sanctions or enforce judicial-style rulings, but rather in preventing the escalation of conflict (Nisa, 2016, pp. 8-9). However, the failure to de-escalate tensions ultimately led to a second round of bloodshed in 2025, serving as empirical evidence of the difficulties ASEAN faces in transforming from a dialogue facilitator into an entity capable of delivering definitive resolutions. This case clearly demonstrates that while ASEAN is capable of establishing "negative peace"—characterized by a temporary cessation of violence—it still struggles to achieve "positive peace" that addresses the root causes of conflict (Ramli & Idris, 2022, pp. 83-84). Consequently, ASEAN's political-diplomatic instruments have proven to lack the coercive power or punitive measures necessary to guarantee member-state compliance.

The cooperative norms governing Southeast Asian nations within ASEAN are rooted in the principle of non-interference, a stance that prolongs the time required to reach a final resolution on conflicts. Mediating nations—such as Indonesia—were unable to impose a settlement regarding the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia, despite various dialogues held to foster mutual understanding, ranging from informal bilateral meetings in Jakarta to formal discussions at the 18th ASEAN Summit (Hafizh & Wiswayana, 2025, pp. 310). In this context, the application of the non-interference principle acted as an obstacle to resolving the dispute over the Preah Vihear territory. ASEAN members deeply value the principles agreed upon

when they first decided to join the association; consequently, the regional organization's ineffectiveness is a result of the "ASEAN Way" concept, which prioritizes dialogue over interference in a nation's affairs or the imposition of binding decisions on bilateral state relations (Farida, 2014, pp. 59–61).

The "ASEAN Way" prioritizes spaces for dialogue, consultation, and mediation among conflicting states, utilizing consensus as the mechanism for collective decision-making (Hafizh & Wiswayana, 2025, p. 308). Viewed through the lens of the non-interference principle, the ability of member states to facilitate a non-coercive resolution to the Preah Vihear Temple territorial dispute is constrained; their capacity to exert further pressure is limited by their respective national interests and the complexities of bilateral relations. Consensus-based approaches repeatedly employed by ASEAN to address the dispute have failed to yield binding decisions, prompting criticism regarding the efficacy of the consensus principle in this context. As noted by Tan (2017), ASEAN's reliance on these two interdependent yet asymmetric principles hinders the organization from enforcing decisive, binding policies during times of escalating conflict.

First, ASEAN in responding to the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia has limited authority to the function of a dialogue space, not a resolutive one. In this context, the status of regional cooperation experienced by both parties remains under diplomatic pressure regarding the dispute management system and the principles of the ASEAN Way. Efforts to resolve this regional conflict are not coercive, but persuasive, initiated by a diplomatic approach, including meeting space facilities, diplomatic visits, negotiations, and building dialogue directed at achieving consensus. Facilities at various levels of multilateral forums have seated both countries at the negotiating table to resolve this dispute, namely: the informal forum of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting on February 22, 2011, which resulted in an agreement on dialogue through the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) mechanism, a permanent ceasefire, and the involvement of ASEAN as a mediator; the Joint Border Committee (JBC) which discussed the demarcation of the western boundary and the TOR (Term of Reference) for the monitoring team, where this did not achieve significant success; and the agenda of the ASEAN Summit (ASEAN Summit) on May 7-8, 2011, which resulted in 10 ASEAN decision steps regarding the Settlement and Management of the Preah Vihear Conflict, which continues to prioritize non-violent peace, despite experiencing stagnant conditions during the ceasefire incident (Nisa, 2016; Pottu & Siahaan, 2021). The shift from military-based conflict to diplomacy through forums confirms that ASEAN chooses to regulate dispute management rather than its resolution (Tan, n.d, p. 71). Therefore, formally, ASEAN only plays a role in preventing the escalation of the territorial dispute between Thailand and Cambodia from further impact without permanent law binding both parties has become a major criticism. The Settlement and Management of the Preah Vihear Conflict, which continues to prioritize non-violent peace, despite experiencing stagnant conditions during the ceasefire incident (Nisa, 2016; Pottu & Siahaan, 2021).

Second, the principle of non-interference in the ASEAN Way, which respects the sovereignty of each member state, actually limits ASEAN's ability to take firm and concrete policies. According to Nisa (2016), Indonesia, as Chair of ASEAN in 2011, carried out its mandate with shuttle diplomacy in the form of alternating visits to Bangkok, Thailand, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to listen to each party's complaints, which were intended as a persuasive way (peacemaking) to find common ground without military pressure. The rigidity of this non-interference principle gave rise to the basic constitutional doctrine of ASEAN (Farida, 2014, p. 61-62), thus hampering peacebuilding that is the reconstruction of long-term relations and the permanent resolution of territorial disputes, even the root of the problem is difficult to reach.

This ineffectiveness is relevant to ASEAN's role, which is considered loose due to its lack of coercive law enforcement authority. After the first step taken at the JBC forum failed, the second and third steps, namely the dispatch and full assignment of the monitoring team, could not be implemented as scheduled (Nisa, 2016, p. 11-12). ASEAN established a security principle, namely the Security Community for the countries under its auspices through a peace resolution (Naqsabandiyah, 2025, p. 1). However, the focus on resolving the ASEAN Way resulted in the two member states not being subject to severe sanctions or coercive efforts from ASEAN. This conflict also became polemic, because Cambodia actually brought this issue to an international organization, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to claim ownership of the Preah Vihear temple (Naqsabandiyah, 2025, p. 1). The reliance on the ICJ and the absence of a regional decision enforcement mechanism exacerbated the territorial dispute that could not be resolved internally by ASEAN. The emergence of dependence on the ICJ stems from ASEAN instruments that are more political-diplomatic than legally coercive (Farida, 2014, pp. 59), as seen in Cambodia's choice to re-report this dispute to the UN and the ICJ because bilateral and regional mechanisms are unable to provide binding legal certainty (Pottu & Siahaan, 2021, pp. 6). In this context, it can be said that ASEAN does not have a long-term solution for Thailand or Cambodia in the territorial dispute over the Preah Vihear Temple.

Third, ASEAN's formal policy of using consensus mechanisms backfired in situations involving historical territorial disputes between Thailand and Cambodia. The ASEAN Charter and the TAC, which helped resolve issues between members internally, were rejected in the Preah Vihear conflict by one of the parties concerned to compromise at the regional level (Nisa, 2016, p. 12-13). ASEAN's authority to mediate conflicts is considered ineffective because the laws established by ASEAN are not repressive and binding, leaving many loopholes for member states to avoid long-term settlements and resolutions. The principles underlying ASEAN's multiregional organization as the umbrella organization for Southeast Asia have become obstacles to the realization of positive peace that is touted in the implementation of cooperation between countries. It can be said that the consensus mechanism obtained as a form of member authority only prolongs the conflict and prevents a strong resolution without the imposition of severe sanctions on both countries, Thailand and Cambodia.

Fourth, ASEAN's ineffectiveness is fueled by Thailand and Cambodia's continued prioritization of national interests and sovereignty over their commitments as ASEAN countries. Thailand and Cambodia have their own interests in interpreting the border dispute, which has its roots in the French colonial era in 1907. Thailand interprets the boundary inaccurately, arguing that the area around the temple belongs to them, while Cambodia maintains the demarcation line until it submits for recognition.to UNESCO to make the temple a world heritage site of Cambodia, which then triggered clashes that resulted in loss of life in 2009 (Nisa, 2016; Pottu & Siahaan, 2021 ; Rateliffe, 2025). During negotiations in 2008, Cambodia demanded the involvement of a third party, namely ASEAN, as a mediator and facilitator. However, Thailand's Defense Minister, Prawit Wongsuwun, rejected the decision (Pottu & Siahaan, 2021, p. 2-3). Although the UN Security Council ultimately officially appointed ASEAN as the third party and Thailand's stance changed, this demonstrates the country's continued commitment to prioritizing national interests.Thus, domestic political factors and nationalism often play a far more crucial role than the international cooperation mechanisms legitimized by regionalism.

ASEAN, in carrying out its duties as a regional, is considered ineffective in resolving the Thailand-Cambodia conflict in the long term. The ceasefire in an effort to stop the violence meets the criteria for a temporary negative peace through shuttle diplomacy (Ramli & Idris, 2022, p. 83-84), but does not reach positive peace, where ASEAN's principles often mention the achievement of its organization as a forum for togetherness. The effectiveness of ASEAN can be said to have failed to achieve a resolution of the rooted conflict, the goal of preventing the conflict from escalating further by being a stabilizer did not produce a permanent solution for both parties so that until now Thailand and Cambodia are still in the territorial dispute of the Preah Vihear Temple. The negative peace resolution is contradictory for ASEAN as a multiregional organization that emphasizes positive peace so that criticism of the realization of lasting peace is attached to ASEAN because of its failure to reconstruct a long-term solution through its authority.

ASEAN, in carrying out its duties as a regional organization, is considered ineffective in resolving the Thailand-Cambodia conflict in the long term. The ceasefire in an effort to stop the violence meets the criteria for a temporary negative peace through shuttle diplomacy (Ramli & Idris, 2022, pp. 83-84), but does not reach positive peace, where ASEAN's principles often mention the achievement of its organization as a forum for togetherness. This case illustrates a paradox that is specific to how ASEAN norms are locally constructed, rather than a generic weakness applicable to any territorial dispute among its members. Unlike disputes resolved through a single round of mediation, the Preah Vihear conflict resurfaced across three distinct periods (2008–2011, 2011–2013, and 2025) despite mediation efforts and a binding ICJ ruling in 2013, so that until now Thailand and Cambodia are still in the territorial dispute of the Preah Vihear Temple. This recurrence suggests that ASEAN's non-interference principle is not simply a rule that member states fail to enforce, but a norm that Thailand and Cambodia have each localized differently to legitimize their own sovereignty claims reinforced by domestic

political volatility, as seen in the 2025 civil-military tension within Thailand's government.

Read through the lens of norm localization, this outcome confirms the study's central argument: ASEAN's collective identity around non-interference and consensus does not dissolve national interpretations of sovereignty; instead, it provides member states with a shared vocabulary that each can reconstruct to justify a different national position. The negative peace resolution is therefore contradictory for ASEAN as a regional organization that emphasizes positive peace, not because of a one-off diplomatic failure, but because the ASEAN Way, as a socially constructed and continuously localized norm, was never designed to override domestic political identity in the first place. This finding also suggests that ASEAN's institutional weakness in this conflict is less a matter of missing enforcement mechanisms and more a matter of unresolved tension between a shared regional identity and divergent local reconstructions of what that identity permits.

CONCLUSIONS

The conflict between Thailand and Cambodia originated from disagreements over the 1907 mapping of the Preah Vihear Temple during the French colonial period, which later became the foundation of Cambodia's territorial claim and Thailand's rejection of that decision. However, the conflict has evolved beyond a historical border dispute into a multidimensional crisis involving military clashes, cyber disruptions, trade restrictions, diplomatic withdrawals, and humanitarian impacts in 2025. Domestic political instability in Thailand, particularly tensions between civilian authorities and the military, further intensified the situation and influenced foreign policy toward Cambodia. In this context, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has played an important role as a regional stabilizer through the ASEAN Way, emphasizing diplomacy, consensus, and non-coercive conflict management. Through mediation efforts, informal meetings, the Joint Border Committee, and Indonesia's shuttle diplomacy, ASEAN has been able to prevent the conflict from escalating into a wider regional war and maintain relative stability in Southeast Asia.

Nevertheless, ASEAN's role remains limited in achieving long-term conflict resolution. The principles of non-interference and consensus-based decision-making restrict ASEAN from enforcing binding agreements or taking decisive action when both parties fail to cooperate. As a result, important measures such as border demarcation and monitoring mechanisms have often been delayed, while Cambodia has increasingly relied on the International Court of Justice for legal certainty. This demonstrates that ASEAN functions more effectively as a conflict manager than a conflict resolver. Although ASEAN has succeeded in creating negative peace by reducing military escalation, it has not fully achieved positive peace because underlying issues such as territorial ambiguity, historical grievances, and mutual distrust remain unresolved. ASEAN's failure to transform from a mere "dialogue facilitator" into a "problem solver" is clear evidence that its normative

identity is being tested by a more aggressive contemporary geopolitical reality. Therefore, the Thailand–Cambodia conflict specifically highlights the need for ASEAN to strengthen its institutional capacity and dispute-resolution mechanisms so that future regional conflicts can be managed not only through temporary stabilization, but also through sustainable and legally enforceable solutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, ASEAN should strengthen its institutional capacity while preserving the core principles of the ASEAN Way.

First, ASEAN should establish a more structured regional dispute-settlement mechanism equipped with clearer mediation procedures, monitoring arrangements, and follow-up evaluations to improve compliance among member states.

Second, ASEAN should enhance preventive diplomacy by developing an early warning system capable of identifying potential interstate tensions before they escalate into armed conflict.

Third, ASEAN should strengthen cooperation with international legal institutions, particularly the International Court of Justice, to complement diplomatic efforts in resolving territorial disputes requiring legal certainty.

Fourth, both Thailand and Cambodia should prioritize bilateral confidence-building measures, particularly in border areas. This includes establishing joint development programs, reopening communication channels at the local level, and ensuring the safety of civilians living near disputed zones. Transforming border areas from conflict zones into areas of cooperation—such as through shared economic projects or cultural exchanges—can reduce hostility and build mutual trust over time.

Fifth, ASEAN should place greater emphasis on the humanitarian dimension of the conflict. The displacement of civilians, disruption of economic activity, and limited access to basic services highlight the urgent need for humanitarian assistance and protection mechanisms. ASEAN, in collaboration with relevant organizations, should ensure that affected communities receive adequate support, including emergency aid, infrastructure restoration, and economic recovery programs.

Finally, both Thailand and Cambodia should prioritize confidence-building measures through sustained bilateral dialogue, joint border development and humanitarian cooperation to reduce mistrust and prevent future escalation. These recommendations are expected to improve ASEAN's effectiveness not only in managing conflicts but also in promoting sustainable regional peace consistent with the principles of regionalism.

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