

The 13th ASEAN–United States Summit and the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord: Remote and Immediate Contexts, Prospects for Enduring Peace between Cambodia and Thailand.

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Abstract

This paper examined the Association of South East Asia Nations and United States of American brokered peace initiative to end the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia on the sidelines of the 2025 ASEAN- US summit in Malaysia hailed as a landmark intervention to restore lasting peace to the troubled area. Using the secondary method and descriptive research, findings reveal that, some of the immediate and remote causes of the conflict were identified as wrong interpretation of colonial maps, economic issues relating to mining activities along the disputed territories, frequent clashes between military forces of both countries, the strong nationalist sentiments among both countries population and the increasing external influence that continue to fuel the conflict. The paper also appraised key highlights of the peace accord which include the abrogation of the resort to use of force by both parties in the conflict, strategic withdrawal of heavy weapons from boarder areas, a setting up of a joint de-mining and humanitarian assistance committee, the exchange of prisoners to build trust and confidence and proper border demarcation. The prospects of the workability of the peace accord was also analyzed, emphasizing the timeliness and appropriateness of the signing of the accord , positioning and projecting the essential role of the ASEAN as an effective regional integration body, the prospect for the pursuit of peace through dialogue, negation and conciliation. Some challenges however were identified that are likely to impede the smooth implementation of the accord such as ambiguity in some of the provisions, for example the mandates and rules of engagement of the ASEAN operational team, domestic constraints on both parties to the accord, difficulties in weapons verifications, financial constraints, opposition from criminal groups and the challenges of handling humanitarian response. The study therefore concluded that the historic accord between Thailand and Cambodia is a commendable diplomatic breakthrough that is capable of enhancing regional integration in the south Eastern Asia sub region and has the tendency to de –escalate significantly the troubled area. The paper recommends many options to ensure the sustainability of the peace accord, these include the need for a joint border survey and demarcation acceptable to the parties, sustained confidence building and reconciliation measures, adoption of modern dispute adjudication and resolution mechanism, removal of ambiguity in the AOT mandate, sustain mobilization of donor funds to support ASEAN efforts and sustenance of adequate public communication .

Keywords: ASEAN, ASEAN Summit, Peace Accord, Enduring Peace, Kuala Lumpur Summit

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an inter-governmental international organization, comprised of Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Brunei, Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, Cambodia, Singapore and Malaysia. On 25th October 2025 the ASEAN/ United States Summit was held in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, culminating in the with land mark peace agreement between Cambodia and Thailand, two nations locked in a bitter disagreement over border demarcation. It was hailed as a diplomatic triumph midwifed by the Trump administration, which is a fallout of earlier ceasefire and suave diplomatic shuttle. The US attaches a lot of regards to the ASEAN because of its strategic economic position according to Brian McFeeters, Interim CEO and President of USABC. “the U.S.-ASEAN trade has surged to \$553 billion annually, with ASEAN now America’s 4th largest export market. Furthermore, ASEAN is projected to become the world’s 4th largest economy by 2030. For those of us who have spent our lives and careers working in Southeast Asia, we need no convincing that ASEAN matters. We know what the opportunities are, but it is incumbent on us to share this information with others.

The peace accord expressively made provisions for withdrawal of some categories of heavy weapons from the disputed border zones, following deadly border clashes that had killed over 40 people and displaced 300,000 this year alone. The crisis between Thailand and Cambodia is a longstanding and multi-faceted. Rooted in colonial-era mapping, contested sovereignty claims around cultural heritage sites (notably the Preah Vihear temple promontory), and competing domestic political logics in both capitals, the dispute periodically escalates into kinetic confrontations. In 2025 the dispute flared into one of the deadliest episodes in recent years, producing dozens of fatalities, mass displacement of civilians, economic disruption, and the re-militarization of border zones. The July 2025 five-day conflict and subsequent incidents created both humanitarian urgency and regional concern about spillover effects. The terms of peace also stipulated the prospects of joint humanitarian operations by both countries with the support of the United States and ASEAN countries. The mediators also put in place Observer Team to monitor compliance to minimize cross-border crime and violence. The accord is seen as a diplomatic breakthrough for the sustenance of peace and unity that has eluded the indo – pacific region as a result geo –political rivalry and foreign proxy wars. Intra-regional security crises.

This work therefore seeks to examine proximate and immediate causes of the Cambodia–Thailand conflict, appraise Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord between the two countries and discuss the prospects of sustainable peace between the two neighbors. The critical issue to be examined in this essay is whether the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord, signed on the margins of the 13th ASEAN–United States Summit, can realistically convert a fragile ceasefire into an enduring peace to reduce the humanitarian toll and displacement of hundreds of thousands, civilian casualties among border communities.

2.0 Objectives

- i. To examine the immediate and remote causes of the Thailand –Cambodia conflict
- ii. To evaluate the major aspects of the Kuala Lumpur peace accord facilitated by the ASEN/ US Summit.
- iii. To discuss the prospects of enduring peace between Thailand and Cambodia

3.0 Research Questions

- i. What are the immediate and remote causes of the Thailand – Cambodia conflict?
- ii. What are the main provisions of the peace accord?
- iii. How can the peace accord lead to enduring and sustainable peace between Thailand and Cambodia?

4.0 Propositions

- i. The Kuala Lumpur peace accord if faithfully implemented will enhance peaceful co-existence between Thailand and Cambodia.
- ii. The peace accord will consolidate the regional cohesion and security of the ASEN countries and increase US influence in the region.

5.0 Conceptual Review

5.1 The concept of Peace accord

Peace accords are negotiated agreements entered into by parties in a dispute aimed at ending, open hostilities; it includes peace implementation process in which parties translate cessation of violence into institutional arrangements, demobilization, dispute settlement mechanisms, and reconciliation (Fortna, 2004; Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). A key point to note is that accords facilitate cessation of hostilities as well as addressing structural causes of conflict such as governance, land rights, livelihoods and other factors that underlie conflict (Galtung, 1969). Peace accords or agreements that focus narrowly on military de-escalation without credible mechanisms for verification, dispute resolution, and addressing grievances often produce only fragile settlements vulnerable to relapse.

5.2 The concept of Summit Diplomacy

Summit diplomacy refers to the practice of high-level diplomatic meetings between heads of state or government of different countries. Such meetings are usually held to discuss and resolve complex international issues that require the attention and decision-making of top political leaders. Summits are relevant in multilateral negotiations and have been used to resolve complex and intractable disagreements and conflicts in the international system. Examples of Summit

diplomacy may include sponsoring conferences such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – US summit and the convening of regular meetings of the UN, its agencies, and regional organizations which provide forums for parliamentary diplomacy and negotiation. Summits are held to also address intractable and long standing issues of international concern, example of other summits include, the US – African summit, the G20 summit, the Economic community of west African states (ECOWAS) heads of states summit amongst others.

5.3 The ASEAN as a Regional Institutions and Conflict Mediation

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) established in 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration. It is a geopolitical and economic organization institutionalised to accelerate socio-economic and political economic growth, social progress and cultural development of its member states. The organization founding principles could be summarized to include: fostering Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations in the region, protecting the right of every State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion i.e. maintain the independence and territorial integrity of member states, which include the Non-interference in the internal affairs of one another, the Settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful manner, the renunciation of the threat or use of force and the Effective economic cooperation among member states which basically focus on a single market and production base, ensuring the ASEAN region become a highly competitive economic region integrated into global economy and sustained equitable economic development across the region.

Regional organizations such as the ASEAN offers much needed support for peace implementation (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). ASEAN's has no doubt positioned its self as a reliable organization to leverage on its rich experience and diplomatic culture premised on consensus. Severino (2006: 8) asserts that 'Southeast Asian peoples hardly knew one another, having been cut off from one another by the colonialism before the establishment of the ASEAN. The ASEAN has galvanized the region into a region with freer movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour, and capital. It is expected that people within the ASEAN region will move in response to the new economic opportunities created by the regional group. For example the body adopted a resolution recently that Member States must promote fair and appropriate employment protection, and adequate access to decent working and living conditions for migrant workers.

6.0 Empirical Review:

6.1 Historical causes of the conflict Between Thailand and Cambodia (Remote and Immediate)

The Cambodia–Thailand border dispute traces back to colonial times and treaties in the early 20th century. Some of the causes include (Anwar, 1995):

i. Wrong Interpretation of colonial maps:

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1962, awarding Preah Vihear temple promontory a highly revered heritage site to Cambodia which enabled Cambodia to be listed on the world heritage listing, infuriating Thailand, the resultant implications of this pronouncement and

identified ambiguity in the ruling, precipitated cross-border skirmishes between rural farmers and communities. The judgment rather than assuage the tension further enflamed passion and discontentment.

ii. Economic causes

Accusations of new land-mining triggered a violent confrontation. In 2025, this led to five-day of intense fighting in late July that led to the killing of several people on both sides and many others displaced including thousands of civilians. Similarly the Preah Vihear temple generate significant revenue from tourist visit, these revenue are derived from commercial activities in and around the temple area. The gulf of Thailand is also believed to have significant deposit of oil deposits and natural gas estimated at up to 11 trillion cubic feet. (www.asia.nikkei.com/thailand and cambodia agree on disputed, energy and rich waters) a major source of disagreement between the parties.

iii. Intermittent clashes between Militaries of both Countries on Patrol at the Boarder

One of the immediate causes of the conflict is the frequent tension and clash between the military of both countries stationed on both sides of the border post, for example in May 2025 a fatal confrontation broke out leading to fatality and intervention of the international community for a ceasefire through diplomatic efforts by the ASEAN chair and external actors (notably the United States, China, and others) helped secure an initial ceasefire in late July, creating a window for a more comprehensive accord in October.

iii. External Influences

The growing interest in the ASEAN region by China and the United States, and their push to dominate the economy and assert their influence is a significant factor in creating tension and conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. The ASEAN therefore become the beautiful bride courted by competing powers, for example while the ASEAN simultaneously endorsed China-led multilateral trade agreements, individual members pursued U.S.-led bilateral agreements. This dual approach reflects ASEAN's economic reality, in which China is the largest trading partner for all ten ASEAN members, while the United States is the top foreign investor, a crucial export market, and security partner for several of its members. The palpable tension between Washington and Beijing becomes more complicated to sustain. For example, the Philippines, which assumes ASEAN's chairmanship in 2026, is expected to push the South China Sea question to the top of the ASEAN agenda given its own maritime disputes with China. This could strain the consensus with Cambodia and Laos, which maintain closer ties to Beijing and further threaten the fragile peace of the region (Anwar, 1995).

iv. Nationalism

The modern era has seen episodic flare-ups. Notably, the 2008–2011 crisis around Preah Vihear produced sustained skirmishes and casualties, and the issue has periodically reemerged as domestic political opponents in both countries mobilize nationalist sentiment. The strong passion and

sentiments among the population of both countries has forged nationalist feeling among them to defend and protect the national interest of their various countries.

6. 2 Overview of ASEAN – US Relationship

The ASEAN and US have a very robust relationship spanning several decades of diplomatic and economic ties, the ASEAN countries are sought after by the US because together they have a GDP of approximately \$3.9 trillion and a population of 678 million people. The United States and ASEAN meet regularly on trade and investment issues and the US goods and services trade with ASEAN totaled an estimated \$571.7 billion in 2024, up 13.4 percent (\$67.6 billion) from 2023. U.S. total goods trade (exports plus imports) with ASEAN was an estimated \$475.6 billion in 2024. U.S. goods exports to ASEAN in 2024 were \$123.5 billion, up 15.3 percent (\$16.4 billion) from 2023. U.S. goods imports from ASEAN in 2024 totaled \$352.1 billion, up 13.3 percent (\$41.4 billion) from 2023. The U.S. goods trade deficit with ASEAN was \$228.5 billion in 2024, a 12.3 percent increase (\$25.0 billion) over 2023. Under the current American government of Trump, this relationship has been nurtured and consolidated. This is the second time that President Donald Trump attended an ASEAN summit, and ensured the signing of multiple bilateral trade agreements with Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. In some of the deals, the U.S. will maintain a baseline 19% tariff on ASEAN exports, while offering exemptions for specific products in exchange for concessions on U.S. market access (Anwar, 1995).

Another relevant example is Malaysia was able to secure tariff exemptions for 1,711 products, including electronics and rubber goods, in exchange for aligning with U.S. sanctions policy, most likely aimed at Russia and China, that has the potentials to threaten Malaysia's longstanding neutrality and may force difficult choices regarding trade with China or Russia. President Trump also brokered two Memoranda of Understanding on critical minerals with Malaysia and Thailand. These agreements demonstrate that the U.S. is combining a strategy of re-industrialization with "friend-shoring", aiming to redirect supply chains through allied economies in critical sectors for high-tech manufacturing. Similarly, while Vietnam also signed a trade framework to address its \$123 billion trade surplus with America, and has been increasing its security ties with the United States, it must carefully manage its relationship with China, which is becoming an important trade and investment partner, and which shares a common ideological background and border (Anwar, 1995).

Thailand is another country that has been walking a fine line with its relationship between Washington and Beijing. In recent years, Thailand, a traditional U.S. ally in the region and a key partner in the struggle against Communism, has become closer to Beijing. Thailand has distanced itself from the U.S. in part due to criticism by previous U.S. administrations of the state of democratic institutions in the country, and in part due to China's growing economic influence. The presence of a U.S. head of state as a witness in the Kuala Lumpur accord signing signals a strong relationship between the US and ASEAN countries .

6.3 Appraisal of key highlights of the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord

The accord expressively reaffirms the commitment of the parties to refrain from the threat or use of force and to settle disputes peacefully in line with the ASEAN declaration and treaty. This provision is purposely aimed at minimizing to the barest minimum military confrontation and escalation of the conflict.

An important provision hailed by diplomats and mediators alike is the immediate commitment to withdrawal of heavy weapons from border zones and their return to regular bases, with a verification mechanism put in place to ensure compliance by the ASEAN. This measure is to further demilitarize the border area to reduce the resumption of hostilities after the accord is signed and implemented

There is also the provision on the proactive conception of an ASEAN Observer Team (AOT) saddled with the task of monitoring compliance on agreed terms in the accord such as troop withdrawals, de-mining activities and weapons regulation at the disputed area.

The parties also agreed to set up a joint de-mining and humanitarian assistance program aimed at removing land mines on both sides of the divide, facilitate the rebuilding of damaged infrastructure, and safely facilitate the returns of displaced civilians as a result of the conflict; this provision is intended to heal the wounds of the traumatized population and enhance their safety and collective wellbeing.

The parties also commit to the release and exchange of prisoners of war to show their willingness to forgive and forge ahead with the peace process this is aimed at rebuilding confidence and offers channels of trust and communication and prospects of joint border surveys, and cooperation against transnational crimes such as smuggling and human and drug trafficking.

Finally, they agreed to encourage technical cooperation toward acceptable and mutually agreed boundary demarcation, including options for legal referral to international tribunals if bilateral mechanisms remained inconclusive.. (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/27/what-in.thethai-cambodiapeace-agreement-canithold?>)

These provisions covers military de-escalation with operational mechanism and steps toward long-term settlement. The accord places emphasis on ASEAN observation and joint humanitarian action response plan to the specific humanitarian and verification vulnerabilities exposed by various clashes.

7.0 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Functionalist and Neo –functionalist theory as propounded by scholars such as Haans (1958) and Mitrany (1957). It was an off shoot of the Functionalist theoretical perspective in International Relations focusing on how international organizations and regimes facilitate cooperation and coordination among states. Functionalism as a precursor theory to Neo functionalism arose during the inter-War period principally from the strong concern about the obsolescence of the state as a form of social organization. States had built authority structures upon a principle of territorialism. Functionalism therefore argues for a systemic approach to the

formation of international organizations that advocates international cooperation on scientific, humanitarian, social, and economic issues. Functionalism, in social sciences, is premised on aspects of a society; institutions, roles, norms that serve the long-term survival of the society. The functionalist theory has been criticized over the last several decades, in the social sciences for being a static form of theory incapable of explaining social change, methodologically impotent and ideologically tainted, functionalism stands accused of being socially and politically reactionary (Faia 1986)

Neo-functionalism on the other hand is a theory that focuses on regional integration, it dwells on the role collective regional cooperation and collaboration play in economic integration. Neo-functionalism is often associated with the integration of Europe with the setting up of the European Union, it is generally associated with political and economic goals, as well as the integration strategies (Dunn 2012). The Neo-functionalism describes and explains the process of regional integration with reference to how interaction and integration lead to growing economic interdependence between nations, how nations organize themselves to resolve disputes and build international legal regimes, how they adopt supranational market rules that replace national regulatory regimes.

Though neo-functionalism offers a comprehensive explanation of integration, the failings of integration in European with the pulling out of Britain from the EU tagged BREXIT posed a serious challenge to some of the assumptions of neo-functionalism. The theory was criticized for failing to account for increasing protectionism and limitations to integration put up by member states at times due to their national economic interest (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2006). The neo-functional theory is relevant to this work because integration of the ASEAN countries has greatly enhanced peace and economic development of South Eastern Asia Nations through collaboration and integration.

8.0 The Accord and Prospect for Enduring Peace in the ASEAN Region

The Cambodia–Thailand, the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord laid the foundation for lasting and sustainable peace between the parties, the accord offers a remarkable pathway to addressing the root causes of the dispute and ensuring healing and reconciliation. The accord provides the much needed prospects for peace between the two neighbours in the following ways.

i. Appropriate timing of the accord signing

Signing of the peace accord on the margins of the ASEAN–U.S. Summit generated the much needed international visibility and involvement. The presence of high-level international witnesses in the personalities of Malaysia's prime minister and the U.S. president provided symbolic guarantees that non-compliance may result in international condemnation and action which acts as deterrence to the two countries involved. It therefore means that International attention can strengthen compliance as violating the spirit of the agreement may have diplomatic consequences.

ii. Positioning ASEAN as a proactive regional integration body

ASEAN has metamorphosed to a region of peace building and economic prosperity. The body's original founding countries have refrained from waging war against one another since the Association was established a clear attestation that the body is committed to maintaining peace

and security in the region . ASEAN has also developed various set of principles that engender peaceful settlement of disputes and non-use of force. This is captured and enshrined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation whose main provision is the principle of non-interference, ably supported by a Southeast Asia culture and tradition of consensus building and handling of disputes with overtones of kinship and common interests, embodied in the Javanese practices of *musyawarah* (consultation) and *mufakat* (consensus), and popularly described as the ASEAN Way. (<https://www.eria.org/asean50-vol.1-11.intro-asean-then-and-now.pdf>)

iii. The triumph of diplomatic Negotiation, mediation and arbitration

The accord has been widely commended as a triumph of diplomatic negotiation and mediation, following initial ceasefire agreement in July 2025 and the persistent efforts by Malaysian mediators that spearheaded consultations between both countries. Cambodia further took additional step in June 2025 to petition the International Court of Justice to bring further disputed border areas under adjudication, a legal move reflecting Phnom Penh's preference for exploiting judicial option as part of the resolution of territorial issues, this disposition also tally with Thailand willingness to also exploit bilateral negotiation on the issue (Reuters, June 2025). These disposition to negotiation, arbitration and mediatory efforts set the diplomatic foundation for a summit-level agreement. The 13th ASEAN–United States Summit in Kuala Lumpur offered a diplomatic stage for a final signing which is seen as a victory to various diplomatic efforts to avoid humanitarian crisis and avoidable death if the crisis persists. The icing on the cake was the presence of external leaders (including the U.S. President) which created an opportunity for both parties to deliver an agreement with international seal and approval.

iv. Domestic Political pressure and credibility

The accord was seamlessly consummated following domestic political calculations on the part of the leadership of both countries. According to Fearon (1994) leadership survival, public opinion, civil society pressures, and elite competition—shape whether governments honor international commitment. Both Cambodia and Thailand have domestic population with stakes in the disputed border. The fear of backlash from nationalists, the military hierarchy who are in the frontlines of fire, domestic economic players bearing the brunt of the crisis on their businesses, and displaced civilians exert tremendous pressure on the political leadership on both sides to reach a truce.

v. Provision for concrete Operational strategies

An interesting dynamic of the accord is its provision for a concrete operational steps to address insecurity in the region troubled spot. Its express provision on weapon withdrawals, de-mining, joint border surveys, and setting up of an observer mission, gave a strong signal to enemies of the accord that the ASEAN mean business and has proactively put in place measures for successful implementation of the terms of the accord , and create space for political normalization. These enhance the confidence of parties in the agreement and reduce the risk of unintended escalation by increasing transparency (troop withdrawals, notifications of maneuvers, joint de-mining) and by creating third-party verification mechanisms (Kydd, 2003). Verification measures put in place is essential because it douses distrust which has the potential of leading to re-mobilization in the presence of ambiguity. Similarly, Independent observer missions, robust reporting, and impartial

incident investigation units are internationally recognized Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) that increase compliance probability provided they are resourced, protected, and accepted by both parties.

vi. ASEAN Driven Peace Process with External Support

The accord combined the hybrid approach of combining ASEAN capacity to drive the peace process with the capacity and support of foreign partners that have committed to offering technical and logistical support. This scenario indicates respect for regional ownership of the peace process while allowing external partners to also be involved with minimal suspicion. It tried to avoid the perception that the peace accord was a fully external driven. Though the role of external interest was duly acknowledged, their involvement was needed in leveraging international expertise such as technical de-mining assistance, training, remote sensing, and funding from bilateral donors.

9.0 Identified Challenges to the Implementation of the Accord

i. Ambiguity in some of the provisions

There were observed ambiguity in the mandates and rules of engagement of the ASEAN observer team (AOT), which was not exhaustively detailed enough in the accord. This ambiguity may actually be a stumbling block to its achievement of its goals and objectives, the success of any observer mission is predicated on clear operational terms that guarantees freedom of movement, unfettered access to contested sites, secure communications channels, data on incident investigation authority, and a public reporting framework, these provisions were not stated in the accord. Ambiguity can hinder monitoring and allow one side to manipulate information in an attempt to gain favorable advantage in the implementation of the provisions of the accord. Moreover, ASEAN missions have traditionally relied on consent, lack necessary equipment and enforcement capacities.

ii. Domestic constraints in Thailand and Cambodia

Both governments face domestic constraints that may resist granting of concessions and shifting grounds. In Thailand for example there is pervasive nationalist sentiments and the military command retain huge influence over border security policy and decision which may inhibit implementation of the peace accord on its part, this means that perception of conceding sovereignty or territory may be resisted, can be politically costly. On the other hand in Cambodia government must also try to assuage nationalist suspicion by balance pursuing international adjudication through the ICJ signaling Phnom Penh's preference for legal avenues, which may be prolonged.

iii. Weapons verification and depot checks.

Implement phased withdrawals with documented inventories; use technical verification (satellite imagery, on-site inspections) to confirm compliance. The process of verification and taking inventory of the weapons may be very difficult and cumbersome. Similarly identifying arms storage depots may also be a challenge.

iv. Opposition from criminal gangs and other Non-State Actors

Stiff opposition from criminal gangs of the peace accord on both sides poses a significant challenge to the accord, similarly, non-state actors such as local militias, organized criminal groups profiting from smuggling or illicit resource extraction may also oppose or circumvent implementation measures, complicating de-mining and community reintegration to continue their illicit operations and derail the peace process.

v. Resource and Capacity Gaps

Implementation and monitoring of this type of peace process involve heavy financial expenses, activities such as de-mining, verification, humanitarian assistance to displaced persons, and joint technical military patrols and surveillance requires funding, equipment, and trained personnel to be effectively carried out successfully. ASEAN's institutional capacity to provide the much needed funds to enhance the peace process may be limited and poses a serious challenge, they may rely on bilateral donors and international agencies to egg on the peace process.

vi. Challenge of handling humanitarian response and protection of civilians.

Handling the plethora of displaced persons on both sides could pose a serious challenge, issues such as prioritized safe corridors for displaced persons to shield them from harm's way, emergency medical aid and supply in internally displaced camps, and provision of temporary shelters and protective measures for aid convoys is a herculean tasks that needs meticulous planning and execution for effective results.

10.0 The Role of External Actors in the Peace Process

The U.S. presence at the signing was instructive. U.S. diplomatic engagement whether framed as guarantee, facilitator of donor funds, or political witness confers a lot of credibility on the entire process as a world power. However, they were fears that the overbearing presence of external involvement risks provoking nationalist backlash in both country and complicating the entire process capable of down playing the role of ASEAN as a regional body. What is expected by many stakeholders is for external actors such as the US, should operate more or less as technical partners supporting in providing funding, logistics, and verification technology, under the ASEAN leadership. China's role and interest should also be taken into cognizance, as it also maintains considerable presence in the region, further complicating the great-power dynamics in the conflict and the region.

11.0 Conclusion

The signed October 2025 Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord at the ASEAN–United States Summit is a pragmatic and landmark diplomatic breakthrough that has shaped regional integration in the south eastern Asia sub region. The beauty of the agreement is that it is a consolidation of the initial July 2025 ceasefire agreement. The main plank of the agreement includes withdrawal of weapons from border areas, de-mining across contentious area, the setting up of an ASEAN Observer Team, the institution of humanitarian intervention for displaced people on both sides, and a comprehensive

roadmap for technical cooperation on border management. However, the accord's success may be inhibited by challenges such as ambiguity in colonial boundary demarcations, cultural heritage claims, and domestic political pressures. Other challenges may also include the lack of clarity in the mandate of the observer mission, capacity to fund de-mining and humanitarian assistance for displaced, widespread domestic political resistance in Phnom Penh and Bangkok, and the possibility of criminals and non-state actors undermining peace implementation programme put in place by the ASEAN. The accord has contributed to the de-escalation and stabilization of the disputed areas, there is need for all hand to be on deck to lead to the realization of the strategic objectives of the accord, the role of the ASEAN leadership, international partners would be very relevant in this regards. Conversely, the failure to implement verification and to align domestic incentives to the process may likely not sustain the much desired peace. The accord however stand as a valuable contribution to confidence-building that has the potential of leading to an acceptable negotiated boundary demarcation acceptable to both parties. Finally the Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord represents a dynamic, regional effort to contain the violent escalation between Cambodia and Thailand. Its content invariably aligns with international best practice for conflict intervention and mediation.

12.0 Recommendations

To bolster the Kuala Lumpur Accord's prospects for enduring peace, the following recommendations are articulated to offer lasting peace in the region.

i. Urgent need for Joint border survey and demarcation

There is need to carry out a comprehensive boundary surveys based on historical treaties and the ICJ rulings to accommodate the fears of both parties, Where immediate consensus is impossible, a special buffer management zones can be created to be managed by the ASEAN until amicable terms of agreement are reached. In this regard, it is hereby suggested that a Joint Border Commission be established imbued with technical, legal, and proportionate representation. The JBC's mandate should encompass border demarcation, management of shared resources, and dispute adjudication. Including maintaining an interim buffer or management zone where immediate consensus is lacking.

ii. Sustained confidence-building and local reconciliation

To ensure sustainability of the peace accord, it is imperative to encourage and support cross-border community dialogues and reconciliation, livelihood restoration programs, and joint economic projects that link to border stability, these measures will enhance market rehabilitation and shared water management.

iii. Exploit modern dispute adjudication and resolution mechanisms

The rulings and intervention of the international court of justice following Cambodia's petition provide a legal window for final resolution of the dispute; judicial mechanisms still remain an available option to contentious conflicts. To encourage this suggestion the ASEAN should set up an independent and impartial incident investigation mechanism under the observer mission that can rapidly investigate alleged violations and recommend immediate action. Also to achieve long term legal and institutional resolution, the parties should keep open the option of third-party arbitration and conflict management arrangements put in place under the ASEAN brokered accord.

iv. Spell out clearly AOT mandate to remove ambiguity

The ASEAN operation team (AOT) mandate should be clearly defined and stated, access rights to disputed sites, reporting time line requirements, composition of the team including its technical experts in de-mining and cartography and the mandate of independent incident investigation, will reduce ambiguity and enhance the mission success .

v. Mobilize donor funds to support ASEAN efforts

The international community led by the United States of America is enjoined to give adequate financial and logistical support to the ASEAN peace process. The support may include support to the AOT in carrying out its mandate, local training of de-miners, policing of safe return corridors, and reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure such as schools, clinics, markets. Other external support from EU, UN agencies, ASEAN Dialogue Partners should be seen as technical and financial assistance rather than political patronage. Which may be interpreted as external interference and control.

vi. Adoption of adequate public communication strategies

Governments of both countries should adopt communication strategies to sensitize their population on the accruable benefits of the peace accord and the necessary implementation steps put in place. This will ensure the publics are well informed and mobilized adequately to support the peace process wholeheartedly for the overall success of the peace process.

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